



POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 11th December 2024

REPORT TITLE:	RE-PROVISION OF LAND AND ENHANCEMENT OF SPORTS PITCH PROVISIONS SURROUNDING THE NEW BUILD MOSSLANDS SCHOOL OFF MOSSLANDS ROAD AND CROSS LANE WALLASEY.
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN FAMILY AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report is further to a successful application to the Department for Education (DFE) as part of the priority school build programme to rebuild the Mosslands High School.

The DFE have taken responsibility, for the new build programme for the school through this approach. They are funding and delivering the school rebuild and have taken responsibility for all activity in relation to procurement of the primary contractor and have complete oversight of the new build programme, for works that reside within the red line boundary of the school. The DFE will not invest in any works which sit outside of the red line boundary of the school.

The existing School does not have sufficient dedicated outside space and playing facilities, and has made use of part of the adjacent Wallacre site for grass sports. This report outlines the investment required in the surrounding green spaces and associated financial implications.

In order to reinstate the playing pitch provision on the remaining Wallacre land, that sits to the south of the proposed new school, and to address the ongoing issues with flooding in this area, groundworks are required to the remaining section of the Wallacre site.

This report outlines the requirement for funding to support the re-purposing of the Wallacre and Cross Lane sites to enable a new build Mosslands School. At this stage a cost estimate of £3.09m is in place, across the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years and the report sets out a request for funding for this amount.

The recommendations align with the following themes within the Council's Plan 2023-2027:

- Theme 2: Working together to improve early help for children and families;
- Theme 5: Working together to protect our environment; and
- Theme 6: Working together to create safe, resilient, and engaged communities.

This decision affects the Wallasey Ward and is a Key Decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Policy and Resources Committee is requested to recommended to Council the approval of provisional funding of £3.09 million to be earmarked to deliver the works required at the land adjacent to Cross Lane and the remaining Wallacre site to the south of the proposed new Mosslands school.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the requirements for the re-provision of any loss in playing pitch provision. The council's Unitary Development Plan and the emerging Local Plan supports the delivery of the National Planning Policy Framework by requiring that any loss of green space or playing pitch provision must be re-provided elsewhere.
- 1.2 As outlined in 1.1 above, without the investment in the re-provision of the playing pitches, it is likely that any planning applications submitted by the DFE, relating to the development of the new build school will face objections from Sport England and may result in failure to secure overall planning permission for the new school.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Consideration has been given to rebuilding the Mosslands school within its existing red line boundary, therefore removing the need for the reduction to the current playing pitch provision on the Wallacre site. However, when the feasibility of this option was considered, significant challenges were identified. Building designers identified that there would be considerable practical difficulties in building a new school within the current red line boundary. These included, lost design opportunities to deliver the best educational outcome and sports facilities for pupils and the wider community, as per the recommendations within the DFE's Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools. In addition, if the new school was to be built within the confines of the existing site, the Wallacre playing fields would need to be used as the site of a temporary school, leaving this area inaccessible to the community for approximately 40 months.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Mosslands High School is located on Cross Lane in Wallasey. The Wallasey area of Wirral is served by four secondary schools, Oldershaw School, St Mary's Catholic College, Mosslands School (Boys) and Weatherhead (Girls). Weatherhead School was fully rebuilt as part of the Wirral 'Private Finance Initiative' scheme in 2007. Within this locality, and until the Mosslands school is rebuilt, there is inequality between girls and boys in relation to the condition of the schools which they are accessing.
- 3.2 The current existing Wallacre playing pitches are unusable during parts of the year due to extensive flooding. This hinders these facilities delivery to the community. The land adjacent to Cross Lane has previously been maintained by the Council as playing pitches, however, they are now overgrown.
- 3.3 In 2022 the Council made an application to the Department for Education (DFE) as part of the priority school build programme to rebuild the Mosslands High School. The application was made in February 2022 based on the very poor condition of Mosslands School and on the basis that a new build programme was the only viable option.

- 3.4 If the Council had not made the application to the DFE priority build programme, it would have had to utilise the budget for School Condition Allocation. This funding covers capital oversight for all schools that the Council has responsibility for, and is limited in terms of available funds, in relation to the number of schools in need of works to improve their condition.
- 3.5 The Council included four schools in its application to the DFE, and was notified in the summer of 2022, that it had been successful with two schools. The criteria which the DFE use for the scoring of applications, is based on data from DFE condition surveys, which are benchmarked against applications by other Councils.
- 3.6 The DFE have taken responsibility for the new build programme for the Mosslands school. They are funding and delivering all activity in relation to procurement of the primary contractor and have complete oversight of the new build programme, for works that reside within the red line boundary of the school. The DFE will not invest in any works which sit outside of the red line boundary of the school.
- 3.7 As the Council began to work with the DFE in 2022 to develop the new school build project, it was established that the existing Mosslands school did not have sufficient dedicated outside space and playing facilities, as recommended in the DFE's – Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools and it was noted that the school was making use of part of the adjacent Wallacre site for grass sports.
- 3.8 In response to identifying this issue, on 3 November 2023, under section 122 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council approved the appropriation of a section of land on the adjacent Wallacre playing fields for educational purposes.
- 3.9 As a result of the land appropriation and the proposals for a new build school being built on a section of the Wallacre playing fields, national and local planning policy requires the re-provision of the loss of green space and playing pitch provision. The proposed mitigation of this involves the restoration of the green space and playing pitch provision at the land adjacent to Cross Lane (a plan showing this can be found in Appendix 1). Furthermore, in order to reinstate the playing pitch provision on the remaining Wallacre land, that sits to the south of the proposed new school, and to address the ongoing issues with flooding in this area, groundworks are required to the remaining section of the Wallacre site.
- 3.10 Initial cost estimates indicate that approximately £3.09 Million will be required for works relating to the sub-division of the existing Wallacre site, including the provision of improved green space and playing pitches at the land adjacent to Cross Lane. These works include:
- Relocation of the public footway and cycle path from its existing position alongside the current Mosslands boundary fence, to a new location alongside the new school boundary;
 - Provision of a new underground drainage system including a water attenuation system to mitigate flood risk, connecting into the existing culvert, with improvement works required to the outlet drainage;
 - Provision of a new boundary secure fence line to the southern boundary of the new Mosslands school red-line boundary, in parallel with the reinstatement of the public footpath and cycleway in-accordance with highway standards;

- Re-levelling, seeding and making good to the re-provided area of the Wallacre site, including protection of biodiversity areas to the south westerly edge of the site;
- Marking out the newly formed green space areas to provide the required pitch provisions including the re- establishment of the green space up to playing field / sports pitch standards;
- Upgrading the Wallacre site existing on-site changing facilities;
- Explore the re-purposing of the land to the West of the current Mosslands school, which is currently overgrown and unusable, to provide an enhanced biodiversity area.
- Carrying out works to the land adjacent to the Cross Lane site to bring this area back to a fully usable open space area for multiple sports provisions. The current budget estimate for these associated reinstatement works includes for the provision of car parking, installation of an adequate ground drainage system, and re-levelling, seeding and lining of the newly formed areas.

3.11 The above works will be programmed to be carried out alongside the new school re-build programme and are expected to be delivered during the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 As outlined in this report, funding is required to support the re-purposing of the Wallacre and Cross Lane sites. At this stage a cost estimate of £3.09m is in place, across the 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years. Site investigation works and site surveys are ongoing, the outcome of which, in addition to any inflationary uplifts required, may impact the total capital investment.

5.2 In adherence to the governance procedures of the Capital programme, a business case will be prepared and submitted for the approval of members as part of the next Capital Monitoring report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Any contract award for works associated with the £3.09 Million, would be made on either a lowest bidder, most economically advantageous tender basis or through an approved Framework route. The Council's Contract Procedure rules set out how contracts are to be awarded by the Council in accordance with its Procurement Strategy requirements.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 The capital works team within Asset Management will continue to support the DFE, the Education directorate and Mosslands High School through to the successful overall completion of this project.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Sport England's possible objections to the proposals for the re-provision of playing pitch facilities, may result in failure to secure overall planning permission to build the new school. A justification for the re provision will need to be addressed within the planning application.
- 7.2 Inability of council officers to secure adequate funding to support the works outlined in this report, may leave the council unable to meet its obligations under any planning conditions, therefore preventing the new build school scheme from moving forward. This can be mitigated by Council authorising the addition of £3.09m into the capital programme for 2025/26, which will allow the council to make improvements to the quantity and quality of the surrounding playing pitches, in line with national and local planning requirements.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Public Consultation has been undertaken prior to a decision being taken in November 2023 for the appropriation of a section of the Wallacre land to the Mosslands school.
- 8.2 Further public consultation will be carried out for the Mosslands New build scheme and the proposals surrounding the Wallacre and Cross Lane site as part of the full planning application.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity. There are no direct equality implications from this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The land to the West of the current Mosslands school, which was originally used many years ago as sports pitches for the school, is overgrown and unusable for building or recreation due to severe flooding. This land will be repurposed to provide an enhanced biodiversity (BNG) habitat area and wetlands, in order to compensate for the BNG loss within the Wallacre and Cross Lane sites.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Whilst the existing Mosslands school sits in the heart of the local community, it is currently limited to what out of hours external recreational provisions it can provide to the community. The new build school will have greatly improved internal and external sporting facilities including: -
- 2 New Sports Halls;
 - A 3G pitch provision;
 - A Multi Use Games Area;

- Outdoor Tennis Courts; and
- Large external open play areas including a fully compliant school sport provision.

11.2 These enhancements to the school environment will not only benefit the pupils but both local and wider communities in terms of its opportunities for offering out of hours recreational sporting uses. In parallel to which, the planned surrounding enhanced and re-provided sport pitch facilities on both the Wallace and Cross Lane sites provide greatly improved, well drained sport pitch facilities, to be enjoyed by both the local and wider community areas.

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Wirral Council

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Plan showing the Mosslands School, the Wallace site and the land adjacent to Cross Lane.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Department for Education – Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools

National Planning Policy Framework

Wirral Unitary Development Plan

Wirral Local Plan

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by this Committee in accordance with section b of its Terms of Reference.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Officer Decision Notice – Approval to appropriate public open space at part of Wallace playing fields for educational use.	03 November 2023
Officer Decision Notice – Approval to consult on the appropriation of public open space at part of Wallace playing fields for educational use.	17 July 2023