

An update on building developments at Silverwood School

Executive summary

This report provides an update on the building developments at Silverwood School, a co-educational special school for children and young people aged 4 to 19 years formed in September of 2020 with campuses in Rowde, Trowbridge and Chippenham (former schools of Rowdeford, Larkrise and St Nicholas). It focuses on the accommodation solutions only. The educational benefits arising from the Systems of Excellence work will be presented separately, in September 2023.

Children's Select Committee are invited to consider the following developments:

- a) The growth of 85 pupil places between 2021/22 and 2023/24.
- b) Wilmot Dixon, building contractor for the new build at Rowde, is predicting a 40-week delay to the construction programme. The 33 new classrooms – which were due for September 2023 opening - are expected to be ready for occupation in Spring term 2024.
- c) In 2023/24 Silverwood will operate from Rowde, Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses, together with satellite provision at Paxcroft Primary School (NEW), Longfield/ Longmeadow, and Hardenhuish. There will be some temporary mobile classrooms.
- d) The new co-location with Paxcroft Primary School offers exciting opportunities for inclusion within mainstream; also, a 10-year licence for shared use of green recreational space for Silverwood Trowbridge pupils.
- e) Following Cabinet approval in December 2022, Silverwood School and Wiltshire Council launched a formal consultation in January 2023 to retain and invest in Silverwood Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses. This required a change in Silverwood pupil numbers and a change to the age range.
- f) Following formal consultation on Silverwood Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses, it was agreed to invest pre-allocated funds of £3.6m to invest in the two campuses and secure the long term future of 150 special school places.

Proposal:

It is requested that the committee notes the following developments:

- a) The growth in pupil numbers between 2021/22 and 2023/24.
- b) The new build at Rowde campus (Phase 3) is experiencing construction delays of 40 weeks and this has a detrimental financial impact on the Silverwood contingency.
- c) Transitional arrangements are in place for 2023/24, enabling Silverwood numbers on roll to grow by 50. All existing Silverwood students, together with the planned Reception and Year 7 intake, will have a school place in 2023/24. In addition, new accommodation solutions have secured some educationally advantageous solutions, particularly with Paxcroft Primary School.
- d) The delays to Phase 3 will have programme implications for the delivery of Phase 4 (the Main House at Rowde), as well as Phase 5 (the retention and investment in Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses). The priority is for Silverwood leadership team and staff to deliver well planned and smooth transitions to its pupils.
- e) The consultation on plans to retain and invest in Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses demonstrated support for their long-term retention. A small number of parents raised concerns over the change to their future as primary school campuses. However, Silverwood School have listened and responded to parental concerns and have plans to address them.
- f) The detailed building plans for Phase 5 (retain and invest in Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses) are in the early feasibility stage. The aim is to achieve the same look, feel and space standards across the Silverwood School estate, within the £3.6m allocated to the project.
- g) There is confidence that the new build at Rowde can be delivered within the £27.5m contract sum plus contingency. At June 2023 the contingency is £871k, from which the excess temporary accommodation costs will be taken.
- i) The growth in Silverwood pupil numbers, combined with the changing estate, means that the pace of change needs to be carefully managed to offer the best experience for students and staff – and ensure changes do not have a detrimental impact on the running of the school or a potential Ofsted outcome.

Reason for the update

Wiltshire Council made a significant resource and financial commitment to invest in Silverwood School and the System of Excellence to deliver high quality education for Wiltshire learners with SEND. This paper offers an update on the progress made to date.

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An update on building developments at Silverwood School

Purpose of report

1. Wiltshire Council made a significant resource and financial commitment to invest in Silverwood School and the System of Excellence to deliver high quality education for Wiltshire learners with SEND. This paper offers an update on the progress made with the development of the Silverwood estate.
2. An update on the education developments and impact will be provided as part of the Systems of Excellence briefing in September 2023.

Background

3. In line with the Council 2017 – 2027 business plan, there was a clear priority to protect those who are most vulnerable. The goal was to have “schools that help all pupils achieve” including those who “...are vulnerable to underachievement – including... those with Special Educational or Disabilities (SEND)”
4. In November 2019, Wiltshire Council cabinet committed up to £33m to the North Special Schools project (now known as Silverwood School) to increase the number of places and develop a ‘centre or system of excellence’ for SEN provision. Silverwood School, a co-educational special school for children and young people aged 4 to 19 years formed in September of 2020 with campuses in Rowde, Trowbridge and Chippenham (former schools of Rowdeford, Larkrise and St Nicholas).
5. At the start of 2020/21 Silverwood School had 340 registered planned places. As of March 2021, with growing demand, 377 children were attending the school. In May 2021 the decision was made to increase places to 410 for 2022/23. In anticipation of the new build at Rowde, Silverwood School will increase the number on roll to 460.

Developments

6. Wiltshire Council investment in Silverwood has increased to £38.5million for the development of the system of excellence in special school education in north/central Wiltshire. This includes the building of 33 classrooms at Rowde campus. The architectural and fixtures and furnishing plans for the new classrooms at Rowde continue to reflect the aspirations and ideas shared in the ‘co-production’ workshops with children and families which took place 2019/20.
7. The construction programme is delayed, but pupils should move into the new Rowde classrooms from April 2024.
8. Ahead of new build, the Council and Silverwood have remodelled existing school buildings to build extra capacity for 2022/23 and 2023/24 intakes at Reception and Year 7, as well as transfers in. To meet demand for places, Silverwood has created satellite provision at Longfield, Bellfield (2021),

Hardenhuish (2022) and Paxcroft (2023), whilst waiting for the new build to complete.

9. The satellite provision at Paxcroft Primary (Trowbridge) is causing much excitement, as the special school classroom sits at the heart of the school and forms the basis of a renewed partnership between Silverwood and Paxcroft. Furthermore, Paxcroft has agreed to offer green play space and a forest school to Silverwood under a 10 year licence agreement – thereby improving the conditions for Trowbridge campus students in the long term.
10. In 2023, following a formal consultation exercise, Wiltshire Council agreed to retain and invest £3.6 million to secure 150 special school places at Silverwood Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses. The aim is to create a cohesive 'look and feel' and the same quality learning environment across all three campuses (plus Silverwood College). Early enabling work will take place in 2023, ready for 2025. The plans to upgrade Chippenham and Trowbridge need to be carefully scheduled, to minimise disruption to pupils and staff.
11. The formal consultation on proposed changes to Chippenham and Rowde campuses attracted concerns from a small number of families regarding the change of age range (from all through to primary). Silverwood School has committed to sensitive, carefully managed transitions between campuses. The transition plans will factor in considerations from the pupils, the teaching staff that work with them, and family/carer feedback.
12. To address the small number of objections from parents that 'children [moving to Rowde] will not be visible in their local communities', there is a commitment from Silverwood that it's pupils will continue to access shopping and life skills opportunities at Devizes, Chippenham and Trowbridge.
13. To address the small number of objections from families that 'children [moving to Rowde] will experience excessive home to school transport times, School Transport have undertaken a lot of route planning and have ordered additional vehicles to serve Silverwood School. There is a commitment that journeys will not exceed 75 minutes, door to door.
14. The number of special school places offered by Silverwood continues to grow to meet demand for special school places:

2021/22: The opening of Longmeadow and Bellfield satellites, 20 places

2022/23:

- The creation of the Hardenhuish satellite, 8 places
- Creation of Yew classroom, Rowde, 9 places
- Remodelling of campus accommodation, 8 places

2023/24:

- The expansion of the Hardenhuish satellite, 8 places
- The creation of the Paxcroft satellite, replacing Bellfield, 0 places
- Mobile classroom provision (temporary solution), 24 places
- Remodelling of Rowde art classroom, 8 places

Total = 85 Special School places

15. The addition of 33 classrooms with the new build at Rowde will enable Silverwood to grow pupil numbers in a gradual way from April 2024. In the first instance, existing pupils will transition across from other parts of the Silverwood estate. From September 2024, the school will grow organically, with intakes at Reception and Year 7. With completion of the new build at Rowde, Silverwood has the capacity to grow to 460 pupils – and more if desired.

Main considerations for the committee

16. Wiltshire Council have made a significant resource and financial investment in Silverwood and the system of excellence – and therefore it is important to have confidence that desired outcomes will be achieved. The ambition to deliver ‘world class’ facilities, developed in co-production with SEN learners and their families will be realised across the Silverwood estate. This will pave the way for delivery of a system of excellence.
17. With delays to the construction new build programme – and the rescheduling of works to the Main House and Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses – it is critical to ensure the impact on pupils and staff is minimised throughout the transition period. The programme team (which includes Silverwood School) ensure change is manageable and fully co-ordinated.
18. The plans for the development of Silverwood have evolved rapidly evolving, in response to a changing construction delivery date. However, it is important to recognise plans for Silverwood for 2023/24 are settled.
19. The development of the Silverwood estate would not be possible without the support from Longfield Centre and Bellfield, Hardenhuish and Paxcroft schools, who have all offered temporary ‘satellite’ accommodation. We wish to extend our thanks to them.
20. Silverwood School is due an OFSTED inspection. It is important that estate changes do not have an adverse impact on the judgement of the school.

Environmental impact of the proposal

21. The new build at Rowde will be developed in accordance with carbon neutral principles, including the addition of solar panels on site. The refurbishment of Chippenham and Trowbridge will have due regard to carbon reduction but will be limited due to site and budget constraints. There is a commitment to explore energy grants as refurbishment plans are developed.

Equality and diversity impact of the proposal

22. Equality and diversity impact assessments were submitted in advance of the development of Silverwood Rowde new build and the refurbishment of Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses (with the change in pupil numbers and age range). The impact assessments are updated periodically.

Financial implications

23. Wiltshire Council investment in Silverwood Phase 3 (Rowde new build) increased to £38.5million for the development of the system or centre of excellence for North/Central Wiltshire. The budget funds the £27.5m contract sum for the new build at Rowde, as well as professional fees, furniture, equipment, IT and project contingency.
24. Wilmot Dixon are currently reporting a 40-week delay to project handover. Late damages payments from Wilmot Dixon (estimated at £400,000) will be insufficient to cover the costs of temporary accommodation. Circa £350,000 will need to be drawn from Silverwood Phase 3 contingency funds (£871k at June 2023) to meet temporary accommodation costs in 2023/24.
25. There is the risk that SSE, the provider of the energy substation, will not install the power station by October 2023. There is a risk that Wilmot Dixon can claim £45,000 damages per week from Wiltshire Council if SSE do not complete the installation on time. SSE were paid for the sub-station 18 months ago and legal documents were exchanged in January 2023. The failure of SSE to respond to Council correspondence means we must now escalate the matter to Council leaders and local MPs.
26. Wiltshire Council have provided £3.6million to fund the Phase 5 upgrade of Chippenham and Trowbridge campuses. If there is any contingency remaining from Phase 3, it will be carried over into the Silverwood Phase 5 project.

Conclusion

27. Although there is considerable delay to the new build at Rowde campus, plans to accommodate the 2023/24 Reception and Year 7 intake are secure. Plans to transition secondary-aged pupils from Chippenham and Trowbridge to Rowde will be delayed to the end of 2023/24 school year. Plans to upgrade the Main House and the other campuses will also need to be deferred, to mitigate the impact of disruption and change on pupils and staff. However, the upgrade of all three campuses should be complete by 2025.

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