

North Lanarkshire Council

Report

Education and Families Committee

approval noting

Ref JMcK

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Steps Primary School: School Remedial Works; Capacity Pressures; and Community Provision

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Executive Summary

There have been significant capacity pressures at Steps Primary School and Nursery for many years due to a variety of factors including housebuilding, successful placing request appeals, and government reporter decisions on additional housing. There has been continued resistance from the wider community within the area - to increase the capacity of the school to accommodate the growing school age population – if at the expense of community facility provision at this location.

The school part of the building is currently undergoing remedial works to the drainage, requiring imminent and ongoing decant of pupils. Many options were explored to assist with the decant arrangements whilst delivering the best curriculum experience to pupils with the minimum amount of disruption. Ultimately it was determined that the public library and the community spaces should be repurposed, at least on a temporary basis, as teaching spaces to facilitate the works. However, cognisance also needs to be given to the increased and increasing school roll at the school as we look to the future.

It is clear that current capacity is not sufficient and that the growing population will continue to put pressure on the school estate in this area. It is also clear that, the creation of teaching spaces (within the existing community provision spaces) provides an opportunity to make these spaces permanent for learning and teaching. This will require changes to 'pre-COVID' community provision (library and community rooms).

Through the Town and Community Hub strategy, the council is committed to creating facilities where pupils and the wider population can share locations, optimising spaces such as car parks etc. It should be noted that the community offering of a public library and community space will still be on offer at this site, following completion of the works – and given the current restrictions linked to the pandemic, with no known date when this public library would have been able to open – the timescales where this community will be at a disadvantage to other communities (where public libraries will be open) will be significantly shorter than would be the case outwith the current world pandemic parameters.

Recommendations

The Education and Families Committee is asked to:

1. Note the permanent allocation of all spaces inside the building for sole use by Stepps Primary School and Nursery to facilitate immediate and ongoing education provision requirements.
2. Note that library facilities will be available, but housed within the new modular units, once the work is complete. Note that this will result in no library provision within the building during these works but also note that the Culture and Leisure service will use a blend of mobile library provision and online provision to mitigate some of the impact during this time – where government restrictions allow.
3. Note the current position regarding the remedial works.
4. Note the historic, current and future capacity pressure on Stepps Primary School and Nursery and the requirement to keep this under continued review.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority Improve North Lanarkshire's resource base

Ambition statement (10) Engage with children, young people, parents, carers, and families to help all children and young people reach their full potential

1. Background

- 1.1 Stepps Primary School and Nursery is a PPP School, opened in 2007, with the asset owned and operated by Transform Schools North Lanarkshire (TSNL). Stepps PS opened with a capacity for 328 pupils and a school roll of 307 pupils but now accommodates 394 pupils.
- 1.2 Stepps borders on to Glasgow City Council and has good transport links into the city with a train station and easy access to the M80. As such it has always been attractive to residents looking to commute.
- 1.3 Due to the proximity to Glasgow, and the demand of potential buyers, there is pressure for new housing in the area. There is a sizable amount of green belt in the area. Whilst both the North Lanarkshire Council planning authority and local community have been resistant to housing in the area, the Scottish Government Reporter has approved an application for 200 houses in the area in the last few years.
- 1.4 Separately, through the appropriate channels, residents in the Dunlop streets to the south of Stepps successfully lobbied the Local Government Boundary Commission to form part of North Lanarkshire boundary rather than Glasgow City Council. As the houses - when built, were not part of North Lanarkshire, no education contribution was received. These houses are still zoned to Glasgow City Council schools – we cannot rezone until we have sufficient capacity in our local schools to accommodate the transferring and future pupil populations from this rezoned area but there is continued pressure from that part of the local community to make the transition.

- 1.5 In many ways, the success of this campus to serve both the wider community and the school community is also the reason why it has been so difficult to use the existing footprint to increase school capacity. Any previous conversations have been met with significant resistance from the wider population who enjoy and actively use the community facilities at this campus.
 - 1.6 The council and owners have examined many options to look to both carry out the remedial works and increase the capacity of the building. The ground conditions of the existing site, along with those of neighbouring sites has thwarted attempts to provide a pragmatically deliverable solution. Whilst it can be demonstrated that many options have been explored, it is unlikely that a solution that will suit all parties will ever be found.
 - 1.7 This shows a position where there are multiple stakeholder groups with competing priorities, and that it is highly unlikely that a solution - that will gain support of all stakeholders within the school and wider community - will be found. The needs of the school pupil community - to increase capacity and keep all pupils together thereby ensuring education provision is delivered - will impact on the public library and community facilities on offer at the site. Ultimately however, both school facilities and public library facilities will be available on site following completion of the works.
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2. Report

Part one: Capacity pressures

Historic and current pressures

- 2.1 As outlined above, Stepps PS opened with a capacity for 328 pupils and a school roll of 307 pupils. The school, being of open plan design provided flexibility within the teaching areas through the movable partitions between class bases. This allowed the school to increase the number of teaching bases and the number of spaces by adding additional partitions to each of the teaching wings. The result is an increase in the number of pupils being taught in the same overall space, within smaller individual class teaching bays.
- 2.2 Over the years the school has been attractive to parents not living in the area, particularly to parents from neighbouring Glasgow City Council area, and a number of those parents have sought placing requests at Stepps PS. For many years the education authority has refused placing requests to this school as it could clearly be demonstrated that the school was and is over capacity and space was not sufficient to allow placing requests to be approved. In most cases over the years however, where parents have appealed – as is their right under the placing request legislation – and successfully won their appeal, the council had a legal obligation to provide spaces for these pupils at this school.
- 2.3 The current school roll is circa 394. (120% of capacity) In order to accommodate the increased number of pupils it has already been necessary to use the general purpose (GP) rooms - which should be used for noisy or quite activities (given that the main teaching areas are of open plan design) – into teaching bases to accommodate pupils. This has restricted the learning and teaching activities through the loss of these GP rooms and put additional pressure on ancillary accommodation such as toilets, playground, dining etc.

House building

- 2.4 There has been active housebuilding in the area over the years, which has increased the overall population along with the pupil population. This is anticipated to continue in the near future with the approval (by Scottish Government Planning Reporter) of 200 houses at Hornshill Farm. There is also potential housing at Buchanan Business Park, based on historic planning consent which has potential capacity for around 140 houses.

Future capacity pressures

- 2.5 It is clear that the school requires additional capacity just to meet the needs of the existing pupil population. Add to this the increase in pupil numbers as a result of new housing at Hornshill Farm and Buchanan Business Park. This clearly demonstrates the need to increase capacity to meet the needs of the school community. Projections indicate that, based on known potential demand, that spaces for approximately 500 pupils may be required in the future.
- 2.6 Additionally, as demonstrated by the Hornshill Farm decision which overturned the refusal at a local authority level, it is likely that house builders will continue to put further pressure to approve new housing in this area, which will in turn put further pressure on the available space in the school moving forward.
- 2.7 Given the decision of Scottish Government to overturn that of the local authority, it can be argued that this may be replicated in future given the appetite of house builders to meet anticipated demand. Hypothetically, if at some point in the future, all of the identified green belt was to be provided for housing, an additional two schools may be required in the longer term to meet demand of the increased population. The provision of additional schools would be justified in such a scenario, but would also reduce the capacity requirements at Stepps PS.
- 2.8 Therefore, 'bolting on' extensions in an ad-hoc fashion in order to meet the demand of each development as approved would result in a site that was not fit for purpose and arguably restrict the ability to provide a more robust long term solution for a growing population (as space would have been provided).
- 2.9 Conversely, by using the existing footprint of the entire building, for school provision needed at present and in future years, provides the council with the flexibility to reinstate some of the space for other use (such as back to community use) in subsequent years should it be demonstrated that the future population can be better distributed either through a longer term drop in pupil population within the area, or a marked increase in population through the release of new housing which would require additional schools – with the existing population being considered as part of the overall plans – resulting in a distribution that would result in a smaller cohort at this specific facility.

The solution

- 2.10 It is clear that a more permanent adjustment to the campus is needed to manage the ongoing impact of the growing school population. It is already considered necessary to convert the existing public library and community rooms to teaching spaces, along with the installation of a modular unit, to facilitate the decant of the existing teaching wings.
- 2.11 The permanent adaptations in the public library space would provide longer term increase in school capacity, allowing the school community to use the additional

capacity to meet current and future demand - whilst improving the quality of learning and teaching spaces for the whole school.

- 2.12 The modular units, which are required to facilitate the works, provide the opportunity to repurpose this space for library/community provision once the work is complete. This will ensure that services provided at this site (pre-pandemic) will still be available from this site following the works. During the period of works, Culture & Leisure North Lanarkshire will look to provide a blend of mobile library provision, supported by online services. This will remain in place until the work is complete and the pupils no longer require the modular units for learning and teaching (as the pupils will return to the main teaching wings). It should be noted that all public libraries remain closed across the authority due to the pandemic and will not open again until government restrictions allow this.
- 2.13 It should be noted that, whilst the position of facilities within the site will be different moving forward, the service offering to the community will remain. As is the case with our new Town and Community hub programme – the council is keen to ensure all users can continue to share this site moving forward – albeit through a different design.
- 2.14 It is also observed throughout this paper that the issues within this catchment area are still emerging. Therefore, it is offered that solutions being promoted within this paper are in response to the known issues at this time. There is a risk that more (or indeed less) provision will be required for pupils - as other external factors (such as housebuilding) become clearer. The council will continue to monitor the provision in this area and adjust forward plans as appropriate – as is the case with the rest of the school estate.

Conclusion

- 2.15 It is concluded that, when the presented challenges are examined from a pragmatic perspective:
- 2.15.1 The reallocation of space within the building, to 'single use' for primary and nursery education provision during the day meets the current and currently known future capacity needs of this school community.
- 2.15.2 The permanent installation of modular units at this site show the intention and desire of the council to ensure public library and community facilities remain available at this location following the work.
- 2.15.3 That this proposed arrangement ensure the security and safety of our pupil population in the main building, whilst providing open access on site for community users at the public library.

3 Equality and Diversity

3.1 Fairer Scotland Duty

A full assessment will be carried out at the same time as the EIA outlined below.

3.2 Equality Impact Assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment is currently being developed to gauge impact of the proposals on the school and wider population.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial Impact

There are costs which will be incurred to create the spaces for the decant of pupils from the existing teaching wings – these are already budgeted for.

4.2 HR/Policy/Legislative Impact

There will be changes required to the PPP contract to notify the change, this will be carried out as per normal procedure. There is no known other impact in relation to the reallocation of space.

4.3 Environmental Impact

Given that there is no proposed change to the existing footprint of the building, it is not anticipated that there will be any significant environmental impact of the proposal.

4.4 Risk Impact

4.4.1 Risk of not being able to provide longer term quality of education provision as required to serve the current and future pupil populations.

4.4.2 Risk that the pupil population may require the use of the modular unit in future years due to potential emerging issues (such as more housebuilding). This could result in the whole modular facility being required for education provision - impacting on community provision at the campus.

4.4.3 Risk of significant community objections to the proposals.

5. Measures of success

5.1 School having sufficient capacity to meet needs of education and the space to deliver quality learning and teaching provision.

5.2 Community facilities returned to the site following successful completion of the remedial works.



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