

Replacement of Portobello High School and St John's Primary School

Executive of the Council

12 September 2006

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Executive of further investigations into proposals for the replacement of Portobello High School and St John's Primary School since the last report to the Council in May 2006. Permission is also sought to conduct statutory consultation under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 for proposals to replace the schools, set out in the attached consultation papers.

2 Summary

- 2.1 A detailed feasibility study has been undertaken to consider sites for replacement facilities for Portobello High School and St John's Primary School. Both schools are currently occupying restricted sites and their existing accommodation falls significantly short of the Council's aspirational standards. The proposals constitute an ambitious project which would deliver high quality school facilities, fit for the 21st century, on improved sites which would address both curricular requirements and the Councils' wider policies on community access to urban green space.
- 2.2 A total of 15 sites have been evaluated, from which three sites have been identified as potential options for Portobello High School, and four potential sites for St John's Primary School.
- 2.3 It is proposed to take these site options forward to statutory consultation under Section 22A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The proposals for the two schools may be taken forward in tandem subject to sufficient funding being available. Funding packages are still being explored to deliver these projects.

3 Main report

- 3.1 Report number CEC/08/06-07/C&F & CD presented to the Council on 4 May 2006 outlined a number of options to replace Portobello High School and St John's Primary School, potentially on a new site. An initial assessment of a number of sites had been undertaken, with those sites on Greenfield land appearing to offer the most potential. Further development of the proposals was however required.

- 3.2 The Council decision required a number of actions. The majority of those are addressed in this report either in the results of a feasibility study undertaken to identify all potential sites and their merits and constraints, or in the financial implications section. The remaining actions requested a report on the experience of using a four storey school by the users of St Thomas of Aquin's High School and the provision of findings of a survey of available literature on the optimum size for schools.

St Thomas of Aquins – User Experience

- 3.3 The main building at St Thomas of Aquin's is arranged over 4 storeys. The massing of the school's main building was largely determined by site factors, with planning requirements dictating that the height should follow the terraced housing it replaced. This resulted in a three storey building from street level together with a 'basement level' to address a one-storey drop in ground levels across the site. As the main entrance to the building is at the upper level of the site the school effectively operates a 'three floors up and one floor down' arrangement.
- 3.4 The main assembly / dining area is on the lowest floor, together with music, drama, and CDT departments – so on a few occasions, pupils will require to travel up or down three flights of stairs between classes and at break times. However, travel times will be balanced overall by relatively short horizontal distances due to the compact site. The school has confirmed that no complaints have been received about the 4-storey design, and the lift is only used by those with medical conditions. An additional staircase (beyond minimum requirements for fire safety) was provided which also helps circulation arrangements. The school has reported that travel distance to the main staffroom is a problem for some staff at the extremes of the building, and this may be due in part to the four-storey design. This is offset however by the excellent staff bases which staff tend to use at break and often at lunchtime.
- 3.5 In view of the above, although Portobello is a larger school than St Thomas's, there appear to be no reasons why a three-storey building with four storey elements could not be considered a good solution for Portobello HS, so long as:
- a) Departments and functions are located carefully to meet service access needs and to optimise operational effectiveness
 - b) Overall travel distances are considered both horizontally and vertically for all users
 - c) Lift(s) and stairs are provided to meet travel flow needs and not simply to meet minimum statutory requirements
 - d) Circulation areas (stairs and corridors) are designed to accommodate traffic, promote ease of supervision and incorporate views and natural light (eg, through glazed panels in corridors and naturally lit breakout areas).

Optimum School Size

- 3.6 This report was requested to address the issue of whether Portobello High School should be replaced with one single large school or two smaller schools. A summary of the findings is given below.
- 3.7 Lancaster University published the most significant piece of research in 2004. This was a systematic in-depth review focussing on 31 case studies, of which two thirds were American and a fifth were British. The majority of the studies did not report any statistically significant association between school size and achievement. The review identified problems with cause and effect: does

school size determine attainment or does attainment determine school size? In some studies, whilst there were associations between school size and attainment, these were considerably smaller than the associations between socio-economic status and attainment. Points of interest from this study included:

- a) Four studies that controlled for prior attainment found that student achievement increases as school size increases up to a particular point (or range). After this point, student achievement decreases as school size increases.
- b) The point estimate or range of school size at which achievement is maximised varied within and between these studies. The optimum school size estimate ranged from 600 to 2155 and the optimal year group size ranged from 150 to 225.

3.8 A Scottish study published in 2002 by John W. Sawkins (Heriot Watt University) indicated the following:

- a) The empirical results, in line with previous British studies, underline the importance of family, peer group and school influences in determining educational outcomes. They cast doubt, however, on suggestions that there is an 'optimal' size of school.
- b) Bradley and Taylor (1998) investigate the link between school size and examination performance. They find some evidence for an inverted 'U' shaped relationship between the two, concluding that examination performance is maximised at a school size of around 1,200 pupils for those with the 11-16 year age range in England, and 1,500 for 11-18 year schools.
- c) In direct contradiction to results for England, Scottish estimates suggest a 'U' shaped relationship between school examination performance and the size of the school roll. This anomaly may be due to the relatively modest number of observations leading to a handful of well performing schools at either end of the spectrum having a particularly marked influence in terms of the final results.

3.9 Thomas Spielhofer, Tom Benton & Sandie Schagen (National Foundation for Education Research UK) published in 2004 concluded that the evidence of school size and its impact on student achievement is still inconclusive. They noted that it is important to recognise that school size is associated with a number of other variables which may impact on performance. For example, grammar schools have (on average) smaller cohorts than comprehensive schools. Schools in rural areas tend to be smaller than those in the inner cities, which may have a very different profile in terms of pupil intake and proportion eligible for free school meals. The observed impact of school size, although statistically significant, is quite small; after controlling for prior attainment and other factors, the difference attributable to school size is approximately 0.15 points in terms of average GCSE score. Despite this the NFER recommend that the optimum year group size is between 175 and 200 pupils, which translates to a school of 900 - 1100 pupils in Scottish terms.

3.10 It is apparent that the research is inconclusive and, in addition, is largely drawn from outwith Scotland. Nevertheless the consensus supports the view that planning should avoid very large or very small schools. There seems no reason, therefore, to depart from the Council's present view that schools of up to 1200 pupils are desirable.

Assessment of Potential Sites

- 3.11 In order to progress the proposal further, a more detailed analysis of all site options was required to ensure that the search was exhaustive in considering all options. To this end, a multi-disciplinary external design team was appointed in May 2006 to consider a total of 15 sites in the Portobello area. These sites comprised all the sites identified by the Council as having potential plus any site combinations suggested by the public over the course of the discussion regarding the project in the early part of 2006. Twelve of these sites were specifically for the reprovision of Portobello High School, while the remaining three were solely for the relocation of St John's Primary School (resulting from the suggestion of rebuilding the High School on the sites of the existing two schools). These 15 sites are illustrated in Appendix 1. These feasibility studies are available for inspection in the Members Rooms, and publicly available at Portobello Library, Piershill Library and the Edinburgh Room, Central Library.
- 3.12 Key to the assessment was ensuring a site of sufficient size to accommodate the high school. The School Premises (General Requirements and Standards) (Scotland) Regulations 1967 require a site of 6.8ha to be provided for a school the size of Portobello if its full complement of pitches are to be provided on-site. As available land is limited for the replacement of Portobello High School, it is proposed to continue meeting part of the playing fields requirement by using off-site grass pitch provision but, additionally, to provide a new, full sized all-weather pitch on-site to support curriculum requirements. In determining an appropriate size, recent experience of site sizes for schools being designed for the current Smart School project was utilised. This demonstrated that an area of 4.5ha could easily accommodate a three storey building (with an element of accommodation at a fourth storey), school grounds and provide an all weather pitch on-site. Accordingly, 4.5ha was identified as the optimum size for the replacement of Portobello, bearing in mind the land take constraints.
- 3.13 With regard to the site size assessment for St John's Primary School, the School Premises Regulations require a site size of 1.4ha. This would provide for the school building including nursery provision plus a seven-a-side sized all weather pitch along with playground area. The building would possibly require to be two storeys high.
- 3.14 An initial, 'Level 1' analysis was undertaken for all sites, the results of which are described below. Sites which were not initially ruled out were then considered in a more detailed analysis, which resulted in three sites being identified as candidates for the location of Portobello High School. A further assessment was undertaken for the location of St John's Primary School in a separate report, based on the information gathered for the high school analysis. These assessments were undertaken in such a way that the options for the high school and primary school could be considered as separate proposals if required.
- 3.15 The study focussed on the educational, architectural/planning and community merits of individual sites. A key aspect was also the deliverability of each site with a number of sites being discounted as undeliverable because of complex ownership issues with the requirement to relocate existing users.

Site 1(a) Portobello High School

Site 1(b) St. John's Primary School

- 3.16 The site of Portobello High School was too small by itself to deliver the desired specification for the new high school. A combination of the high school and primary school sites, while falling short of the anticipated size of 4.5ha, could still offer opportunities to deliver a school and all weather pitch. Accordingly the combination of sites (extending to 3.5ha) was taken forward to 'Level 2' analysis.

Site 2(a) Portobello Park (Golf Course)

Site 2(b) Portobello Park (Football Pitches)

- 3.17 Given their location in the centre of the catchment and the Council ownership of the sites, both were taken forward to 'Level 2' analysis.

Site 3(a) Bingham Park Area 1

Site 3(b) Bingham Park Area 2

- 3.18 Individually, these sites were too small for the high school unless considered together. Accordingly, the development of the high school here would represent the almost entire removal of this area of open space to the local community. The sites were poorly located in relation to the catchment area, and access was difficult given the narrow streets leading there, creating potential traffic difficulties. For these reasons, the sites were discounted.

Site 4 Freightliner Terminal

- 3.19 This site has been discounted as being too small and having difficult pedestrian and vehicular access, being bounded by the main railway line on one side and the Portobello bypass on the other. It is also unlikely that Planning Permission would be granted for school use as the site has been identified in the Draft Edinburgh City Local Plan as a "Business and Industry Area" where "development, including change of use that results in the loss of industrial, business or storage floorspace or potential will not be permitted".

Site 5 Cavalry Park

- 3.20 Cavalry Park and the neighbouring site of Holyrood High School (site 13) were discounted as having insurmountable planning issues. The greenbelt, nature conservation and designed landscape designations mean the only remaining developable area is being utilised for Holyrood High School. The sites are also very poorly located for either the high school or primary school catchment areas, being right on the periphery.

Site 6(a) Baileyfield (BLD Developments – formerly Scottish Power)

Site 6(b) Baileyfield (Standard Life)

- 3.21 Site 6(a) on its own was discounted as it is too small but if included along with Site 6(b) a site of sufficient size could be created. Site 6(a) is owned by BL Developments and has been the subject of a recent refusal of planning permission for a supermarket development. Site 6(b) includes a main Ford car dealership incorporating a car showroom, workshops and car parking areas in the ownership of Evans Halshaw and an industrial estate in the ownership of Standard Life comprising a Depot let to the City of Edinburgh Council and five business units which are fully occupied.

3.22 The cost of acquiring these sites, including the disturbance claims resulting from the relocation of the businesses would be extremely costly and alternative locations would be required for the various businesses. This is deemed not feasible or deliverable and the sites have therefore been discounted.

Site 7(a) Jewel Park Area 1

Site 7(b) Jewel Park Area 2

3.23 The developable area of these sites was restricted by flooding risk, accordingly they were considered as one option and taken forward to the 'Level 2' analysis.

Site 8 Powerleague

3.24 Discounted as being too small to accommodate the High School.

Site 9 Marine Bus Garage

3.25 Lothian Buses has carried out an extensive search over the past two years for an alternative site for their depot but, to date, no alternative site has been identified. As Lothian Buses have an operational need for the depot, their existing depot will not be available for use as a site for the school. The depot site on its own is not large enough for the new school and to create a site of sufficient size for the school the adjacent garage and workshop in the ownership of the John Martin Group would also require to be purchased. The costs of these purchases together with the disturbance costs in relocating both owners to alternative sites, assuming alternative suitable sites could be found, would run into many millions of pounds. These sites have therefore been discounted as being too costly and undeliverable.

Site 10(a) Meadowbank Stadium

3.26 This site lies outwith the catchment area, and has been discounted as unlikely to become available within the timeframe.

Site 10(b) St. Margaret's House

3.27 Discounted as being too small and outwith the catchment area.

Site 11 City Edge Greenbelt Land

3.28 Discounted as unlikely to secure planning permission as it would require the release of further greenbelt land for development.

Site 12 Duddingston Primary School (Relocation of St. John's)

3.29 Discounted as being too small for the relocation of St John's

Site 13 Holyrood High School (Relocation of St. John's)

3.30 Discounted for reasons set out for Site 5 above.

Site 14 Figgate Park (Relocation of St. John's)

3.31 Discounted as the developable area of the park would be too small, with the site being prone to flood risk.

Site 15 Waterfront.

- 3.32 Discounted on the advice of planning given the international nature conservation designations, and the difficulties with construction.

Portobello High School Replacement

- 3.33 Sites taken forward to the 'Level 2' analysis are described below.

Portobello and St John's Existing Sites

- 3.34 In order to deliver the required brief for a new high school, the combined sites of the existing schools would be required. This would require the relocation of St John's Primary School to another site. An evaluation of alternative sites for St John's has been conducted, and there are a number of options referred to later in this report. This would introduce a delay into the timing for the high school in that St John's would require to be designed, planning permission secured, built and occupied before construction could commence for Portobello High School.
- 3.35 The main benefit of developing on this site is that the permanent build for the High School does not affect other community assets within the Portobello area. This option however displaces St John's to a new greenfield site location, and decant accommodation may also be required to be located on open space for around two years. This site is also located in the middle of the catchment area, making it more easily accessible to the population of Portobello.
- 3.36 This option presents a huge amount of disruption to the existing high school in that the entire school would require to be decanted for a period of around two years. Given the small size of the existing site, and the health and safety issues of being in such close proximity to a large demolition and build, the preferred strategy would be to decant off-site, and the favoured site for this would be Portobello Park. A full off-site decant has been costed at £5.8m while an on-site decant is slightly more cost effective at £4.6m. The provision of large spaces such as gym halls is not possible with temporary units and some school activities would require to be carried out at an alternative venue(s). It is likely that accommodation for all exams, for example, would not be able to be provided on-campus.

Portobello Golf Course

- 3.37 This location is central within the catchment area, and would avoid the decant and disruption created by redeveloping the existing site. This option would require the relocation of the golf course to an alternative site and would involve some loss of the current open space for the local community. This would have implications for the timescale for delivering the high school should a new golf course require to be established before construction work commenced. The site is not as well accessed as the Park being located one street back from the main road and bus services of Duddingston Park Road, nor is the location as prominent as the Park for a civic building.

Portobello Park

- 3.38 This location is fairly central within the catchment area, and would avoid the decant and disruption created by redeveloping the existing site. This option would allow the school building to be developed whilst being able to reprovide two pitches for community use on the site which the school could also benefit from during the day. The location reflects the road hierarchy in the area, with the Milton Road on the southern boundary being a main route with bus services,

making the location both accessible and prominent, reflecting the civic status of the school. This option would displace the current school traffic from Duddingston Road and its neighbouring streets to Milton Road, which would have greater capacity to accommodate it.

- 3.39 The main issue with this site is the loss of part of an area of existing open space in a well established park.

The Jewel

- 3.40 This site is very poorly related to the catchment area, being located on the southernmost boundary of the catchment area. It also brings the school close to the proposed new location of the new secondary school to serve Craigmillar (in Craigmillar town centre) and it would not be desirable to have two schools offering the same sector of education close to each other. Its development would also mean the loss of a significant proportion of the existing public open space in the area. The site itself has flooding issues and its development would require the relocation of sewers crossing the site.

- 3.41 The merits of developing here centred on being able to avoid the disruption to the school by developing off the existing site. Being bounded by the main road and bus route of Duddingston Park South makes vehicular accessibility slightly better than other discounted sites such as Bingham Park.

- 3.42 The number of disadvantages far outweighed the merits of this site, and it was discounted from further consideration at the 'Level 2' stage of analysis.

- 3.43 As a result of this evaluation, it is proposed to take forward the following three sites for a replacement Portobello High School to statutory consultation.

Option A Existing sites of Portobello High School and St John's Primary School

Option B Portobello Golf Course

Option C Portobello Park Pitches Site

St John's Primary School Replacement

- 3.44 While the main generator for this project is the reprovision of Portobello High School, it would also be desirable to seek the replacement of St John's Primary School given its fitness for purpose. The school building falls well short of the generic brief for primary schools, particularly with significantly undersized rooms and insufficient accommodation in the main building necessitating the use of Temporary Units. Nor does the school have outdoor sports facilities on-site.

- 3.45 One of the three options for the High School necessitates the relocation of St John's as part of the proposal. The opportunity also exists for St John's to be relocated alongside the High School with the other site options should sufficient funding exist.

- 3.46 The options for the redevelopment of St John's are:

a) *The site of the existing Portobello High School* – should the high school relocate, then the surplus site could become available for the redevelopment of St John's. This would represent the least long term implications for St John's, with the school remaining central to its catchment.

- b) *Portobello Park pitches* – either alongside a relocated High School, or as a stand alone facility should Portobello remain on its existing site. The main issue with this would be the loss of the existing park to the community – should both schools relocate here it would be difficult to retain any public pitches within the park area. This location is fairly central to the primary school’s catchment area.
- c) *Portobello Golf Course* - either alongside a relocated High School, or as a stand alone facility should Portobello remain on its existing site. The main issue with this would be the loss of the golf course to the community. This location is central to the primary school’s catchment area.
- d) *Bingham Park* – also requiring a loss of part of an existing park to the community, this site is poorly located within the catchment area and is more difficult to access given the narrow streets. The primary school will generate the requirement for more escorted trips to and from school for the younger pupils (whether by car, bus or walking) and thus its location is particularly important.
- e) *The Jewel* – Another option representing a partial loss of a park, while being located on the very periphery of the catchment area, although being slightly more accessible by vehicle. The location is not far from the new location of St Francis Primary school serving Craigmillar, and it would not be desirable to have two schools offering the same sector of education close to each other. Accordingly, this site has not been taken forward for consultation.

Proposed School Size

- 3.47 As indicated in the 3 May report, an assessment of the size of the high school is required in light of falling pupil numbers in the City. An analysis has been conducted of actual pupil numbers living in the catchment area already attending primary schools. This illustrates that a yearly intake of 220 would be more than sufficient to cater for the number of catchment pupils living in the area. This equates to a school capacity of 1200 pupils. This level of intake also leaves sufficient flexibility to accommodate any children who may be generated from any new housing in the area. Accordingly it is proposed to consult on the basis of the new school having a capacity of 1200 pupils. This would require a reduction in the school’s current intake limit in anticipation of the new school opening.
- 3.48 With regard to St John’s Primary School, it is estimated that the pupil population will continue to support a primary school of the optimum size – a double stream school.

Timing

- 3.49 None of the options allow for the immediate delivery of the high school. The earliest the school could be delivered would be October 2011, however this depends on which option is chosen and how long it takes to secure planning permission. Each of the proposals requires a potentially contentious proposal to relocate either Portobello High School or St John’s Primary School onto a greenfield site. If planning permission can be secured, it is estimated that it could take between six months and two years to secure approval.

Financial Implications

- 3.50 The table below presents the estimated costs of each element of the three options to reprovide Portobello High School. These are current prices and will require uplift to cover construction inflation to the year construction commences for budgeting purposes.

Replacement Cost of Portobello High School	£29m - £30.6m*
Replacement Cost of St John's Primary School	£8.5m
Swimming Pool	£3m
Decant Costs (Option A)	£5.8m
Golf Course Reprovision Costs (Option B)	£3.25m
Pitch Reprovision Costs (Option C)	£0.5m

*Based on a notional capacity of 1200 pupils

- 3.51 These costs assemble to determine the project costs of each option as set out below. The replacement of St John's Primary School is essential under Option A, but optional under Options B and C, depending on the level of resources available.

Option A: Existing Site	£47.9m
Option B: Portobello Golf Course Plus St John's PS @ £8.5m	£35.3m
Option C: Portobello Park Plus St John's PS @ £8.5m	£32.7m

*All current prices, swimming pool included, 1200 capacity, 5% client contingency

- 3.52 The Council's first recourse to fund this proposal will be to apply to the Scottish Executive for funding. Should this approach be unsuccessful, or provide only partial funding, the Council will require to consider alternative funding mechanisms, which may include the release of land to generate capital receipts. In the meantime the City has a limited capital resource and the Capital Investment Programme would not be able to offer a level of investment approaching this cost.
- 3.53 It is proposed to report further, when appropriate, on the success or otherwise of the bid to the Scottish Executive in order to allow the council to make a decision on alternative funding.

Consultation

- 3.54 It is proposed to commence a statutory consultation on the Options presented in this report under Section 22A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Act prescribes the manner in which the consultation should be conducted being a minimum period of 28 days. The Act also prescribes those whose views should be sought. The requirement is to consult with the parent of every pupil at the school and every child expected to be in attendance at the school within two years; the School Board; and any person authorised for the purpose by the church or denominational body in whose interest that school is conducted.

- 3.55 There is clearly a wider community interest in the proposals to replace the schools than the school community alone. There is the formal opportunity for the wider community to make their views known through the statutory planning process should a planning application be submitted to take forward one of these proposals. It is however acknowledged that the community will wish to make their views known at this earlier stage. It is accordingly proposed to seek the wider community views in tandem with the statutory consultation. The report on the outcome of the consultation process will be structured in such a way that clearly identifies the views held by the school community and the views held by the wider community.
- 3.56 It is proposed to commence both consultation exercises on Thursday 14 September 2006 and that the consultation period closes on 30 October 2006. A report on the outcome of the consultation process would be presented to the Full Council on 21 December 2006. Any Council decision recommending a change in location for either school would require to be forwarded to the Scottish Ministers for a final decision under Section 22B of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as both schools are operating at over 80% occupancy. Copies of the consultation papers are included as Appendices 2-5 to this report.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The reprovision of Portobello High School and St John's Primary School is an ambitious project which will deliver high quality school facilities, fit for the 21st century, on improved sites which address both curricular requirements and the Councils' policies on community access to urban green space. The project will, however, be dependent on the ability to deliver a significant source of funding. There are a limited number of school site options, each of which present differing benefits and differing challenges to overcome.

5 Recommendations

The Executive is recommended to:

- 5.1 Note the content of this report;
- 5.2 Approve the commencement of the consultation process for the reprovision of Portobello High School and St John's Primary School as set out in the attached consultation papers;
- 5.3 Agree that the consultation papers be referred to the Scrutiny Panel for Children and Young People as part of the consultation process;
- 5.4 Request a further report on the outcome of the consultation process to be considered by the Full Council on 21 December 2006.

Andrew Holmes
Director of City Development

Roy Jobson
Director of Children and Families

Appendices	Appendix 1: Site Options Appraisal: 15 Sites Appendix 2: Replacement of Portobello High School – Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Consultation Paper Appendix 3: Replacement of Portobello High School – Community Consultation Paper Appendix 4: Replacement of St John’s Primary School – Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Consultation Paper Appendix 5: Replacement of St John’s Primary School – Community Consultation Paper
Contact/tel	Keith Thomson 0131 469 3336
Wards affected	35 Meadowbank; 36 Mountcastle; 39 Portobello; 40 Milton; 57 Craigmillar; 58 Duddingston
Background Papers	