

MEETING	Gwynedd Council Cabinet
DATE	26 January 2021
CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams
OFFICER	Gwern ap Rhisiart
TITLE OF ITEM	New school in Cricieth

1. THE DECISION SOUGHT

The Cabinet is requested to consider the observations received during the statutory consultation period and the response to those observations, and determine whether to:

Approve publishing a statutory notice on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150 and relocate the school to an alternative site, referred to as the A497 site on 1 September 2023 in accordance with Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

2. THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

- 2.1. The purpose of this report is to report to Cabinet following a statutory consultation on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150, relocating the school to an alternative site, referred to as the A497 site, on 1 September 2023.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1. In its meeting on 2 April 2019, the Cabinet approved the right to commence local discussions in order to identify options for the construction of a new primary school in Cricieth, due to the poor condition of Ysgol Trefferthyr's existing buildings.
- 3.2. The need to improve primary provision in Cricieth was identified on the grounds that the condition of Ysgol Trefferthyr's buildings were in category C-. This meant that there were a number of defects in the condition of the buildings that make it uneconomical to continue to try to maintain these buildings in future. Back in 2011, approximately £500,000 was spent in an attempt to extend the lifespan of the buildings for around five years. Surveys now indicate that the effect of this temporary work is drawing to an end.
- 3.3. In submitting a Strategic Outline Programme application for funding from the 21st Century Schools Programme (Band B) to the Welsh Government in 2017, a budget of £4.97m was earmarked for building a new school in Cricieth as part of a £56.14m capital programme, with a contribution of £37.46m from the Welsh Government and £18.68m in match funding from Gwynedd Council.

4. BACKGROUND - Developing the preferred option

- 4.1. A Local Review Panel was established in June 2019 and four meetings were held between June 2019 and June 2020, with the last of these held on 24 June 2020. Panel membership consisted of Governing Body representatives as well as the headteacher of Ysgol Trefferthyr, the Chair of the Governing Body and Local Member. During the meetings, a number of potential sites for locating the new school were discussed,

including the current site and other locations identified jointly with the Governing Body. After appraising the sites, the Panel agreed on the A497 Site as the preferred site.

- 4.2. When considering the longlist of site options, the following requirements were addressed:
- The size of the site
 - Planning considerations
 - Access and traffic considerations
 - Technical considerations
 - Impact on development costs
- 4.3. Eight options were discounted because they did not adequately address some of these requirements. This included the current site because it was not big enough to develop a new school with capacity for 150 and because of site access considerations.
- 4.4. Following this, further consideration was given to a short list of four options. Following work on these options and further meetings of the Local Review Panel, the preferred option was agreed at the meeting held on 24 June 2020. This preferred option was to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150 and relocating the school to the A497 site.
- 4.5. At its meeting on 13 October 2020, the Cabinet gave approval to conducting a statutory consultation, in accordance with the requirements of section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150 and to relocate the school to an alternative site, referred to as the A497 site, on 1 September 2023, and to report back to the Cabinet after completing the consultation.

5. Increasing the project's capital budget

- 5.1. Following receiving the Cabinet's approval on 13 October 2020, and the completion of further planning work on the preferred site, the need was identified to increase the project's budget in order to address additional work and costs. The original application to the Welsh Government requested a contribution towards a capital sum of approximately £4.97m from the 21st Century Schools fund for this project, with £3.23m funded by the Welsh Government and a contribution of £1.74m from Gwynedd Council. Following further land purchase discussions, road adaptations and school planning, additional costs have been identified which means that the project's budget will need to be increased if this additional work is to be realised. In its meeting on 15 December 2020, the Cabinet approved the transferral of £380,000 within the 21st Century Schools Programme in order to increase the budget for the project to build a new school in Cricieth to around £5.35m. Following Cabinet approval, an application has been submitted to the Welsh Government for approval to transfer the funding within Gwynedd Council's 21st Century Schools Programme.
- 5.2. The Cabinet also decided to underwrite the capital sum of £220,000 in order to secure an early years provision as part of the new school in Cricieth should no other financial source be available from the Welsh Government that would coincide with the project's timetable.

6. THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION

- 6.1. In accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the statutory requirements of the School Organisation Code (011/2018), a period of statutory consultation on the proposal was held with relevant consultees between 6 November 2020 and 18 December 2020.
- 6.2. A statutory consultation document (**Appendix A**) was drawn up in accordance with the requirements and guidance of the School Organisation Code (011/2018) and a copy was distributed to all relevant consultees.

As the consultation period fell in the middle of the COVID-19 period, the usual arrangements of providing hard copies of the document to parents, staff and the governing body were adapted. Because of the risks of transferring the infection, a PDF copy of the document was instead shared via e-mail. Should anyone wish to receive them, hard copies were available upon request from the Education Modernisation Office. In addition, it was possible to access all relevant documents including the consultation document and background pack, which included impact assessments on the language, the community and equality and an assessment against the aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), on the Council's website (www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/modernisingeducation).

- 6.3. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, we were unable to conduct any face-to-face consultation sessions, instead people/consultees were offered the opportunity to submit questions in order to gain clarity on any matter relating to the consultation by e-mailing modernisingeducation@gwynedd.llyw.cymru or phoning 01286 679640.
- 6.4. Also, a consultation document was created for primary school children with accompanying questionnaires. Arrangements were made for the headteacher of Ysgol Treferythyr to facilitate the sessions with the pupils of the school as it was not possible to arrange for an external facilitator to visit the school during the COVID-19 period. An analysis of the responses received during the sessions has been included in **Appendix C**.
- 6.5. Ten responses to the statutory consultation were received from the public, Town Council, governors, parents and Estyn together with 78 responses from pupils.

7. OBSERVATIONS RECEIVED DURING THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION

- 7.1. This section summarises the observations received during the statutory consultation period. A copy of a table that includes all observations, along with the Council's response, is available in **Appendix B**. The responses received mainly elaborated on the following matters -

- Support for the proposal
- Community use of the new school and its facilities
- The new school's capacity
- The location of the new school and traffic/transport matters
- Observations by Estyn

7.2. Support for the proposal

- 7.2.1. Comments were received welcoming this investment for the town of Cricieth. In particular, comments were expressed in support of a new building for Ysgol Treferythyr, such as: *"I'm very happy with the news about the new school. It will be excellent for the staff and children and an asset to the community."* It was also noted that a new building would meet academic requirements in the twenty-first century.

The Council welcomes these comments and believes that a new modern school that meets the requirements of teaching and learning in the twenty-first century would enrich the experiences of all stakeholders at Ysgol Treferythyr as well as the wider community.

7.3. Community use of the new school and its facilities

- 7.3.1. Several of the responses received during the statutory consultation express the desire to see community use of the new school's resources and to consider including the playing fields in this.

The Council is of the opinion that creating a new school with modern facilities is an opportunity for the school to collaborate with the community to encourage alternative use of the facilities.

7.4. The new school's capacity

7.4.1. In one response, the question was asked "*why will the capacity of the new school be 150 as history shows that children return to the catchment school with the arrival of a new school*".

As noted in the consultation document, the September 2020 census figures show that there are 117 pupils (nursery class to year 6) at the school and that 29 children from the catchment area attend other schools. In recognising the lessons learnt from previous projects, the Council is of the view that school construction projects must be based on the total number of children residing in the catchment area of the existing school, rather than on the numbers currently attending the school.

7.4.2. Bearing in mind that 29 children went out of catchment in September 2020, and the possibility that this will not be the case once the new school opens, numbers can be expected to increase from 2023 onwards. For this reason, the intention is to build the new school to include five classes to create a capacity of 150 for children aged from reception to year 6 and a nursery class. The Council believes that this would create enough space for all primary age children in the catchment area when the new school opens.

7.5. The location of the new school and traffic/transport matters

7.5.1. Responses to the new school location referred to as the A497 Site are generally positive, with comments such as: "*I fully support the development plans and the selection of the A497 site*" being submitted, and "*Thank you for elaborating on the work that has been done to ensure what appears to be a convenient and pleasant site for all.*".

7.5.2. One comment was received asking why the school is not being built closer to the homes of the children who attend the school.

In response to this, the selection of the proposed site was a detailed process where a total of 11 sites were considered. Detailed investigations and discussions with owners of sites closer to the homes of the majority of the children were carried out and it was concluded that, for a variety of reasons, they were not practical or suitable for such a development.

7.5.3. Observations were received expressing concern regarding traffic issues on the A497 and noting that the road is busy.

In response, a traffic survey was undertaken during the autumn 2020, with a study of the road and pedestrian network on the western side of Cricieth. Speed limits will be extended to the west of the site to provide a buffer zone where the speed is gradually reduced from 60mph to 40mph to 30mph to 20mph. A dedicated turning lane and island will facilitate the right turn into the site. When leaving the site, it will be possible to turn left and right.

7.5.4. One response noted the importance of making the journey to school as safe as possible as some will choose to walk to school as well as travel by car.

In order to alleviate these concerns it is proposed to install a fence that will separate the new pavement from the main road and the fence will run from the entrance to Lôn Fêl (south) to the school entrance. We have looked at Lôn Fel to the north of the A497 and would strongly advise parents not to use this route and to use an alternative route to get to school.

7.5.5. One comment suggested that the lay-by on the A497 road should be closed for safety reasons.

A road and traffic study was undertaken and discussions were held with the Highways Department. The Highways Department was not prepared to close the lay-by as it is a strategic location for lorries carrying large caravans/structures and they use the lay-by to wait for escort vehicles. The lay-by is also used for HGV lorries to rest according to driving time control. There is no intention to have a gate or footpath between the lay-by and the new school in order to avoid school users considering the area as a drop-off point. Speed limits will extend to the west of the school, with a dedicated lane and traffic island to facilitate the right turn into the site. Advice has been received from Gwynedd Council's Highways Development Department that the criteria for a roundabout are not met.

- 7.5.6. Another comment expressed concern about crossing the bridge from the direction of the sea as the road is narrow with a moderate flow of traffic, and only one car at a time can travel along it.

It is proposed to install new signs, road markings and a clear priority system on the railway bridge to warn drivers and protect pedestrians on Lôn Fêl.

- 7.5.7. Another comment expressed concern about the trees on site and light pollution.

Several of the trees near Lôn Fêl are dead and in a dangerous condition but there are no plans to remove all the trees. Tree felling and pruning will take place to ensure the safety of the woodland and trees planted if necessary. Ecologists are working on the project.

The light emanating from the building will be addressed and all lighting will be within planning guidelines.

7.6. Responses to the consultation with children and young people

- 7.6.1. Consultation sessions were held with children at Ysgol Treforthyr led by the headteacher and members of the school staff. 78 questionnaires were submitted to the Education Department following the completion of the consultation session and here are the main findings that arose from the children's responses -

- 58 noted that they were happy to have a larger school. A substantial number indicated that they want more space in the classrooms and outside for play.
- Comments were received asking what if it is not possible to walk to the new school.
- Travelling distance to the new site is something the children are aware of. Comments such as 'far from my house' and 'it's a long car journey' are made by them.
- Children constantly ask for new furniture and equipment in the responses. Things such as Chromebooks, toilets, a sink in classroom, *bean bags, a large playing field and library at the new school.*
- The children are happy to increase the size of the new school and to move to a new location. Only six children out of 78 have noted that they are not happy to move to another location in Cricieth.

- 7.6.2. It can be concluded from an analysis of the responses received from pupils at Ysgol Treforthyr (**Appendix C**) that the children are generally happy to have a larger school. When looking at the responses to moving the school to a new location, the children are aware that there are implications for their current travel arrangements. The Education Department has submitted a Travel Survey questionnaire to the school for completion by the pupils and their parents and the results will be used to set the objectives of the School Travel Plan. The survey will also look at ways in which sustainable travel to school can be encouraged.

- 7.6.3. As a result of the consultation process with children and young people, the Education Department is very supportive of including the full input of all Ysgol Treforthyr stakeholders during the process of planning the new school with the Property Development Department and Architects who are designing the new school.

7.7. Estyn

7.7.1. The School Organisation Code 011/2018 requires proposers to send consultation documents to Estyn. As a consultation body, Estyn gives its views on the consultation. Estyn's full response can be found in **Appendix B**.

7.7.2. In its response to the consultation, Estyn noted:

"The proposal is consistent with the aims of Gwynedd Council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan as well as its Excellent Primary Education for the Children of Gwynedd strategy."

"The Council has properly considered a range of options and selected the above proposal."

7.7.3. In response to the proposal based on the condition of the existing school, Estyn notes:

"It refers relevantly to the outcomes of the recent suitability survey and it was noted that the current school was in a very poor condition and that the buildings significantly impair the staff's ability to deliver the curriculum. It states unequivocally that neither the original building nor the two-storey extension/cabin help school staff to offer an education to the expected standard. It claims categorically that the school is now beyond repair and maintenance."

7.7.4. In considering the impact of increasing the capacity of the school to 150, Estyn notes:

"The proposer states powerfully that the new school will offer primary facilities to the size and standard expected for the twenty-first century, with capacity for 150 pupils. This means that it will be possible to provide six classrooms with external access, a hall, kitchen, multipurpose room and library, all on one floor which will facilitate accessibility and access for all. Increasing the school's capacity to 150, and bearing in mind that the current capacity is 119, there will be an increase of 25% to the capacity to guarantee enough places for the current numbers and some from the catchment area who will possibly attend the school on the new site. The proposer validly bases this on pupil projections."

8. THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

8.1. A Well-being assessment was carried out on the options which gave consideration to Gwynedd Council's well-being objectives.

8.2. The Education Department has a role in promoting the well-being objectives of the Act amongst pupils in the county through its activities and projects. The Act places a duty on public bodies in Wales to improve economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. As part of the duty, the Council has published well-being objectives that outline the way it will improve well-being in the "2018-2023 Gwynedd Plan".

8.3. Following consideration and an assessment in line with the requirements of the Well-being Act, the conclusion was reached that the proposal did satisfy the seven well-being objectives within the Act, and the Council's well-being objectives. This proposal will allow us to respond to and address the children's needs today and strengthen their future well-being. The proposal will mean that the children of the area will be educated in a new school with resources suited to the twenty-first century. It is envisaged that this resource will mean a better education for children in the catchment area and better resources for use by the wider community. (A copy of the assessment is included in **Appendix E**.)

9. EQUALITY

- 9.1. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure that the proposal considers and complies with equal rights.
- 9.2. An equality impact assessment was held on the option to relocate Ysgol Trefferthyr and increase its capacity, which focuses on different elements of equality such as race, gender, disability, language, religion or belief, and age. A copy of the assessment is included in **Appendix E**.
- 9.3. It is anticipated that building a new school will strengthen aspects of equality because it will be better suited to educating every child, especially those with disabilities, by following the guidelines on the construction of modern schools.
- 9.4. The equality assessment reached the conclusion that relocating Ysgol Trefferthyr to the new A497 site will not affect equality, whether characteristics or the general duty.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1. Strong general support was expressed through the consultation for the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150 and relocate the school to an alternative site, referred to as the A497 site, on 1 September 2023.
- 10.2. Following consideration of all the observations received during the statutory consultation period, it is considered that the proposal which was consulted upon remains as the best option for the future of education in the Cricieth catchment area. Analysis of the observations received is examined in Section 7 and **Appendix B**.
- 10.3. Therefore, it is recommended to approve publishing a statutory notice on the proposal to increase the capacity of Ysgol Trefferthyr to 150 and relocate the school to an alternative site, referred to as the A497 site on 1 September 2023 in accordance with Section 48 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013.

11. NEXT STEPS

- 11.1. If the Cabinet resolves to support the recommendations submitted in this report - a statutory notice will need to be issued in accordance with the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the guidance given in the School Organisation Code (011/2018).
- 11.2. Statutory notices would be issued on a school day and there will be a 28-day objection period from the date of issuing the notices. Anyone may object to the proposal.
- 11.3. Following the period of objection, a report will be submitted to the Cabinet for a final decision.
- 11.4. Subject to the decisions of the Cabinet, these are the next steps of the process with an outline timetable:

February 2021	Issue Statutory Notice: If the Council decides to proceed with the proposal, a statutory notice will be published and an objection period will be held. Any objection must be submitted within the 28-day objection period.
May 2021	Cabinet: Following the objection period, the Cabinet will discuss the objections report and decide whether or not to confirm the proposal.
June 2021	Decision referred to Welsh Ministers: In accordance with section 54 of the 2013 Act, within 28 days of the Cabinet's decision, the following bodies can refer the proposal to Welsh Ministers for a decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Another Local Authority affected by the proposal; ii. The appropriate religious body for any school affected; iii. The governing body of a voluntary or foundation school subject to proposals; iv. A trust holding property on behalf of a voluntary or foundation school subject to proposals; v. A further education establishment affected by the proposals.
June 2021 – June 2023	Purchase of land, planning application, construction, and furnishing.
1 September 2023	Implementation of the proposal: Ysgol Trefferthyr moving to a new site, subject to the Cabinet's decisions.

12. VIEWS OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

The Legal Service has advised on this report. No observations to add in relation to propriety.

Head of Finance:

As part 5 of the report states, the Cabinet has already made provision for funding the scheme. Following appropriate consultation, I support the recommendation to release the statutory notice.

Local Member:

It is very encouraging to hear such positive comments from the children. It looks like there is some excitement amongst the pupils to have a school that will be much more suitable than the present school.

I note that there is a bit of nervousness regarding the location in particular because of traffic matters and I trust that the matter will receive attention when developing final plans for the school.

It is good to hear that there is support for the development and can I extend my gratitude to all who have been part of driving the project to this point.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Consultation document

Appendix B: Analysis of Consultation responses

Appendix C: Consultation with children and young people

Appendix D: Individual responses

Appendix E: Impact Assessments:

- Assessment of the Impact on the Community
- Language Impact Assessment
- Well-being Assessment
- Equality Assessment