

Title of report: Allocation of Basic Need Capital Grant for the Expansion of John Masefield High School and Weobley High School

Decision maker: Cabinet Member – Community Services and Assets

Decision date: 26 June 2026

Report by: Head of Educational Development

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

Ledbury South; Weobley;

Purpose

To seek approval to allocate and spend Department for Education (DfE) Basic Need Capital Grant funding to support the expansion of John Masefield High School and the relocation of modular accommodation to Weobley High School.

Recommendation(s)

That the Cabinet Member:

- a) Approves, the delivery of the John Masefield High School expansion and the Weobley High School modular accommodation project within a total budget of £5.390M;**

- b) Delegates authority to the Service Director for Education, Skills and Learning to make all operational decisions required to deliver the works within the overall approved budget, and;**
- c) Delegates authority to the Service Director for Education, Skills and Learning to procure and award all necessary contracts required to deliver the programme of works.**

Alternative options

1. Do nothing - This option is not recommended. The council has a statutory duty to secure sufficient school places. John Masefield High School has been admitting above its published admission number (PAN) at the request of the council for a number of years due to increasing demand in the Ledbury area arising from demographic growth and significant housing development. Failure to expand the school would increase pressure on local secondary school places and reduce the council's ability to meet parental preference and avoid additional transport costs.
2. Retain the existing end-of-life mobile accommodation at Weobley High School. This option is not recommended as the existing accommodation is at the end of its operational life and does not represent a sustainable long-term solution for the school. The proposal to relocate the modular village from Peterchurch Primary School provides improved teaching accommodation, additional classroom and toilet facilities, and represents better value for money through the reuse of an existing council-owned asset.
3. Reuse the modular village for an alternative purpose or dispose of the asset. Alternative reuse opportunities for the modular village were explored, including potential nursery provision. However, planning constraints associated with the suggested location meant that this option was not considered deliverable. Disposal of the modular village was also considered but is not recommended. The modular accommodation was originally purchased with the intention of reuse following completion of the Peterchurch Primary School rebuild project, and disposal would likely realise limited residual value compared to the educational and financial benefits achieved through reuse at Weobley High School.

Key considerations

4. Ensuring there are sufficient school places to meet parental demand is a statutory duty for councils. This requires the council to monitor pupil forecasts and demographic trends and to secure additional capacity where demand exceeds available school places.
5. The objectives of the programme are to increase secondary school capacity within the Ledbury area, improve the quality and suitability of educational accommodation, support the council's statutory sufficiency duties and maximise value from existing educational assets
6. The programme supports the priorities of the Herefordshire Education Strategy 2024-2029, particularly the commitment to ensure access to and availability of high-quality educational places, maintain sufficient school capacity and ensure that educational facilities are fit for purpose in terms of condition, suitability and sufficiency.
7. The programme also supports the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024-2028 priority of enabling children to have the best start in life and ensuring residents can realise their potential through access to high-quality local services and infrastructure.
8. The anticipated benefits of the programme include increased local secondary school capacity, improved educational accommodation, reduced reliance on poor-quality temporary buildings,

enhanced learning environments for pupils and staff, and improved value for money through the reuse of existing council-owned assets.

9. John Masefield High School has been admitting above its published admission number (PAN) at the request of the council for a number of years due to increasing demand in the Ledbury area. This demand has been driven by demographic growth and a number of significant housing developments within the school's catchment area.
10. Without investment, the council's ability to meet future demand for secondary school places in the Ledbury area will become increasingly constrained, whilst Weobley High School would continue to operate from accommodation that has reached the end of its useful life.
11. The proposed expansion would increase John Masefield High School from five forms of entry to six forms of entry, increasing the school's 11–16 capacity from 750 to 900 pupils. This would formalise the additional capacity currently being supported operationally by the school and help ensure sufficient secondary places are available in the area over the longer term.
12. A feasibility study was commissioned to explore options for expanding the school and identified that the required increase in capacity could be achieved through relatively modest and proportionate development works rather than major redevelopment of the site.
13. The feasibility work identified that the increase in pupil numbers creates shortfalls in several curriculum areas, including general teaching classrooms, science provision and specialist teaching spaces. The preferred option addresses these deficiencies while minimising disruption to the operational school and representing the best balance between affordability, deliverability and educational benefit.
14. The proposed works at John Masefield High School are estimated to cost approximately £4.59m including construction costs, surveys, professional fees and internal project costs. Funding will be met from the council's Department for Education (DfE) Basic Need Capital Grant allocation.
15. In parallel, the council has identified an opportunity to improve accommodation at Weobley High School through the relocation and reuse of modular accommodation currently being used at Peterchurch Primary School during its rebuild programme.
16. The existing mobile classroom accommodation at Weobley High School is at the end of its operational life and does not represent a sustainable long-term solution. The proposed relocation of the modular village will provide improved teaching accommodation, additional toilet facilities and an increase in classroom capacity through the provision of two additional classrooms.
17. The modular village was purchased outright as part of the Peterchurch Primary School rebuild project with the intention that it would be reused following completion of the rebuild programme. Reusing the accommodation at Weobley High School represents a cost-effective use of existing council-owned assets and avoids the need to procure additional temporary accommodation.
18. The estimated cost of the Weobley High School project, including relocation, demolition of existing mobile classrooms, groundworks, utility connections and associated fees, is approximately £250k. Approximately £114k of Section 106 funding is available to support the project, with the remaining costs met from the wider approved programme budget.
19. The total programme budget is £5.389m, comprising £5.276m of DfE Basic Need Capital Grant and £114k of Section 106 funding. The programme has been developed to ensure that all proposed works can be delivered within the available funding envelope, with any remaining unallocated funding retained as contingency to manage inflationary pressures, unforeseen

construction costs and programme risks. Procurement activity associated with the programme will be undertaken in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules. Appropriate procurement routes will be identified for each element of the programme, including construction works, professional services and modular relocation works. This may include the use of existing compliant frameworks where appropriate, ensuring compliance with procurement legislation, value-for-money principles and timely delivery of the programme. All projects will be subject to securing the necessary planning consents and statutory approvals prior to commencement.

20. Subject to approval, the projects will progress through detailed design, planning and procurement during 2026/27, with construction and relocation works programmed to minimise disruption to school operations wherever possible.
21. The programme will be managed through the council's established capital project governance arrangements, including financial monitoring, risk management, programme reporting and senior officer oversight. Appropriate support will be provided by procurement, legal, finance and property services throughout delivery.
22. Delivery of the programme is dependent upon securing the necessary planning consents, statutory approvals, successful procurement outcomes and the availability of funding within the approved programme budget.
23. It is anticipated that the works at Weobley High School will commence during the 2026 school summer holidays, with completion expected during the autumn term 2026.
24. For John Masefield High School, the indicative programme is as follows:

Activity	Indicative timescale
Detailed design and surveys	Summer 2026
Planning submission	Autumn 2026
Planning determination and procurement preparation	Winter 2026/27
Procurement and contract award	Spring 2027
Construction phase	Summer 2027 – Spring 2028
Completion and occupation	2028/29 academic year

Community impact

25. The proposed projects support the priorities set out in the Herefordshire Council Plan 2024–2028 by helping to ensure that children and young people have access to high quality education provision within their local communities. The expansion of John Masefield High School will provide additional secondary school places in response to rising demand in the Ledbury area, helping the council meet its statutory duty to secure sufficient school places while supporting parental preference and reducing the need for pupils to travel further distances to access education.
26. The projects also support the council's commitment to strengthening communities and improving opportunities for children and young people. High quality learning environments are more likely to support improved educational outcomes, wellbeing and attendance, whilst also helping schools to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum.
27. The proposal at Weobley High School will replace poor quality end-of-life temporary accommodation with improved classroom and toilet facilities through the reuse of existing

council-owned modular accommodation. This will improve the learning environment for pupils and staff whilst making effective use of public assets.

28. The projects support the priorities of the Herefordshire Education Strategy 2024–2029 by helping to ensure sufficient educational capacity is available in the right locations and that children and young people are educated in learning environments that are fit for purpose in terms of condition, suitability and sufficiency.
29. As with all school improvement and expansion projects, improved educational environments and sufficient local school places contribute positively to outcomes for vulnerable learners, including children in care and care experienced young people, by supporting stability, accessibility and high-quality educational provision within their local communities.

Environmental impact

30. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
31. The projects support the council's environmental objectives through the efficient use and improvement of existing educational assets. The expansion of John Masefield High School represents a proportionate intervention to meet growing demand for school places, reducing the need for pupils to travel longer distances to access secondary education.
32. The proposal at Weobley High School provides a significant environmental benefit through the reuse and relocation of existing modular accommodation currently being used at Peterchurch Primary School. Reusing the modular village extends the operational life of an existing council-owned asset, reduces construction waste and avoids the environmental impact associated with procuring and manufacturing new temporary accommodation.
33. The development of both projects will seek to minimise adverse environmental impacts during delivery. This will include consideration of sustainable construction practices, minimising waste where possible and ensuring efficient use of materials and resources throughout the programme.
34. Any new or refurbished accommodation will seek to improve operational efficiency where practicable, including opportunities to improve insulation, lighting and energy performance as part of the detailed design process. The projects will also seek to minimise disruption to surrounding communities and school operations during construction.

Equality duty

35. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations and demonstrate that it is paying due regard in decision making and service delivery.
36. The mandatory Equality Impact Screening Checklist has been completed for this project and it has been assessed as having a low impact on equality.
37. Due to the potential impact of this project being low, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required. However, the following equality considerations should be taken into account when making a decision about this project:

- a. The expansion of John Masefield High School will support equitable access to local secondary school places by increasing capacity within the Ledbury area, reducing the likelihood of pupils needing to travel further distances to access education provision.
- b. The replacement of end-of-life accommodation at Weobley High School with improved modular accommodation will provide a better quality learning environment for pupils and staff, including improved accessibility, welfare and toilet facilities.
- c. The projects will be designed and delivered in accordance with current building regulations and accessibility requirements, ensuring that the accommodation supports the needs of pupils, staff and visitors, including those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Resource implications

38. The total approved programme budget is £5.389m and will be funded through Department for Education (DfE) Basic Need Capital Grant, together with approximately £114k of Section 106 funding associated with the Weobley High School project.
39. The estimated cost of the John Masefield High School expansion project is approximately £4.6m, including construction costs, professional fees, surveys, internal staff costs and contingency. The project will increase the school's permanent capacity from five forms of entry to six forms of entry.
40. The estimated cost of the Weobley High School project is approximately £250k, including the relocation of the modular village from Peterchurch Primary School, demolition of the existing end-of-life mobile accommodation, groundworks, utility connections and associated professional fees.
41. Any remaining unallocated funding within the overall programme budget will be retained as contingency to manage inflationary pressures, unforeseen construction costs and other project risks across both schemes. The Basic Needs Grant is ringfenced for increasing capacity in schools and therefore any overall underspend will be used after the project completes for future projects at other schools. No additional council borrowing is required to deliver the programme.
42. The projects will be delivered through the council's Programme Management Office with appropriate support from procurement, legal, finance and property services. The costs associated with programme management and professional support are included within the approved project budgets.
43. Procurement activity associated with the programme will be undertaken in accordance with the council's Contract Procedure Rules. Appropriate procurement routes will be identified for each element of the programme, including construction works, professional services and modular relocation works. This may include the use of existing compliant frameworks where appropriate, ensuring compliance with procurement legislation, value-for-money principles and timely delivery of the programme.
44. There are no additional revenue implications to the council arising from these proposals. Ongoing maintenance, operational and lifecycle costs associated with the accommodation will be met through the respective school budgets.

Capital cost of project	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>John Masefield construction costs</i>	50	3,100	650		3,800
<i>Professional fees</i>	150	360	60		570
Weobley HS modular village install	250				250
Internal fees	77	124	30		231
Programme contingency	74	394	70		538
TOTAL	651	3,978	760		5,389

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Future Years	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Basic Need Grant</i>	537	3,978	760		5,275
<i>Section 106 (Weobley High School)</i>	114				114
TOTAL	651	3,978	760		5,389

Legal implications

45. There are no specific legal points raised within this report.
46. The relevant legal provisions for this decision can be found in the council's constitution, www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution.

Risk management

47. The projects will be managed through the council's established capital project governance arrangements. Key risks and mitigation measures are set out below.

Risk / opportunity

Construction inflation and market volatility may increase project costs.

Planning permission or statutory approvals may not be secured within required timescales.

Mitigation

Appropriate contingency has been retained within the overall programme budget and costs will continue to be monitored throughout procurement and delivery.

Early engagement with planning and statutory consultees will be undertaken to minimise delays and identify issues at an early stage.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Construction works may disrupt live school environments.	Detailed construction management and phasing plans will be developed to minimise disruption to pupils, staff and school operations.
Failure to expand John Masefield High School could increase pressure on secondary school places in the Ledbury area.	The proposed expansion will formalise additional capacity already being supported operationally by the school and help the council meet its statutory sufficiency duty.
Failure to progress the Weobley High School scheme may require continued use of deteriorating temporary accommodation or future replacement at greater cost.	The proposal reuses existing council-owned modular accommodation, improving facilities while maximising value from existing assets.
Reuse of the modular village provides an opportunity to reduce waste and improve value for money.	The modular accommodation was originally purchased with future reuse in mind and relocation to Weobley extends the operational life of the asset.

48. Risks associated with programme delivery, cost management and construction activity will be monitored and managed at a service level throughout the programme lifecycle.

Consultees

49. Consultation has taken place with senior leaders at John Masefield High School and Weobley High School, both of whom are supportive of the proposals and have been engaged throughout the development of the projects and feasibility work.
50. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Ledbury Councillors have been consulted and are all supportive of the proposals.
51. Political Group Consultation took place on 18 June 2026. Members from the Conservative Party, Independents for Herefordshire, True Independents, The Green Party and the Liberal Democrats. The consultation was recorded and shared with all members. No objections raised and Members were supportive of both proposals, particularly the reuse of the modular village and the need for additional capacity at John Masefield High School. Members sought clarification regarding project costs, teacher recruitment, sustainable travel and the reuse of modular accommodation
52. Ongoing engagement will continue with both schools, project stakeholders and statutory consultees throughout the design, planning and delivery phases of the programme.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None identified

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

Acronym / term	Meaning
BB103	Building Bulletin 103 – Area Guidelines for Mainstream Schools
DfE	Department for Education
FE	Forms of Entry
JMHS	John Masefield High School
PAN	Published Admission Number
S106	Section 106 developer contribution funding