Victorian Schools Feasibility Study
Autumn 2024

Initial Information for Stakeholders

Introduction

The Council is carrying out a feasibility study, to consider the options for improving the suitability of the city's Victorian school buildings. The feasibility study is a short term project to look at the kinds of work which could be undertaken to help make improvements to the buildings, to establish how these improvements could be made, and how much they would cost.

To help us with the feasibility study, we are inviting comments and feedback from pupils, parents, staff, community groups and anyone else who has any involvement in the buildings (known collectively as stakeholders), to understand what aspects of the buildings are most in need of improvement. This valuable feedback will be used to help inform the outcomes of the feasibility study, and potential next steps.

This information paper explains why the feasibility study is being carried out, and what the study will focus on. Stakeholders are invited to submit their comments and feedback about the feasibility study, using our online consultation hub, which can be found here: https://victorianschoolsfeasibilitystudy.commonplace.is

Background

Within Aberdeen, there are 14 schools which were originally built in the 1800s, or in the very early 1900s, and which are collectively known as our Victorian school buildings. Whilst changes and improvements have been made to these buildings over the years, their construction and design can create some challenges for modern day learning and teaching, and it is recognised that for some of these buildings, more significant improvements may need to be made, to help ensure they remain suitable for education in the 21st Century.

The Council is therefore looking closely at the Victorian buildings most in need of improvement, to consider what changes could be made to the buildings to improve their suitability for learning and teaching.

The feasibility study is focusing in particular on the following Victorian school buildings:

- Sunnybank School
- Gilcomstoun School
- Kittybrewster School
- Skene Square School
- Woodside School
- Aberdeen Grammar School
- Ashley Road School
- Broomhill School
- Culter School
- St Joseph's RC School

The remaining Victorian school buildings are not being looked at in detail as part of the feasibility study, for the reasons listed below:

- Harlaw Academy – work has already been planned separately to make improvements to the suitability of this building.
- Ferryhill School – work has already been planned separately to make improvements to the suitability of this building.
- Hanover Street School – this building was extensively refurbished in 2009, which made significant improvements to its suitability, so no further major improvement works are required at this time.
- St Peter's RC School - work has already been planned separately to make improvements to the suitability of this building.

Feasibility Study

The feasibility study will be used to look in detail at the suitability issues faced in each of the Victorian Schools included in the project, and to identify what options may be available to the Council to make improvements which will address those issues. The advantages and disadvantages of each option will also be considered, along with the likely costs of making the improvements. Details of the types of improvement to be considered in the feasibility study are provided in Appendix 1, below.

Officers will use the findings of the feasibility study to identify a "preferred option" for each school, which will be presented to Councillors for them to consider.

To help understand some of the suitability issues for each of the buildings, we are inviting pupils, parents, school staff, community groups and other stakeholders to tell us what they think about their school buildings, and what they feel should be the priorities for making improvements. Feedback received from stakeholders will then be considered alongside all of the other information gathered during the feasibility study.

Comments and feedback can be submitted via our online consultation hub, which can be found here: https://victorianschoolsfeasibilitystudy.commonplace.is

The findings of the feasibility study, along with summaries of the feedback received from stakeholders, will be included within an Outline Business Case, which will be presented to councillors in early 2025. The councillors will then make a decision on what actions, if any, should be taken next for each school.

Key Dates for Stakeholder Engagement

Week beginning 23rd September:	Stakeholder Engagement Launched
Fri 1st November:	Stakeholder Engagement and Feasibility Study Close
Mon 13th January 2025:	Feasibility Study Summary Report shared on Consultation Hub
Tues 18th February 2025:	Outline Business Case presented to Committee

Initial Questions for Stakeholders

We would like to know your views on the Victorian school(s) in Aberdeen that you are connected with, and how you think they could be improved.

You may wish to consider the following questions:

- *What are the main advantages and disadvantages of the school building and grounds, for supporting modern day learning and teaching?*
- *What sorts of facilities or spaces could be provided, to make the building and grounds more suitable for modern day learning and teaching?*
- *What is the most important change you would like to see made to the school building, to make it more suitable?*
- *What additional information should the Council consider as part of the feasibility study?*
- *What questions about the feasibility study do you have at this stage?*

Feedback on the above questions, and any other relevant comments, can be submitted via our online consultation hub, which can be found here: https://victorianschoolsfeasibilitystudy.commonplace.is/

Appendix 1 – Feasibility Study Brief

Below is a summary of the Feasibility Study Brief which has been issued to Council officers. This outlines the objectives of the project, the options to be considered, and what information the final Feasibility Study Report needs to provide:

Project Objectives

The options identified through this feasibility study must be aimed at achieving the following:

- Improve the suitability of identified elements of the school buildings
- Where possible and where required, provide additional classroom capacity within the school buildings to meet current and future demand for pupil places
- Increase the flexibility of spaces to allow them to be used for different purposes, for example to allow spaces outside classrooms to be used more flexibly to support learning

Improvements to be considered

It is recognised that due to budget limitations, it is unlikely that it will be possible to improve every aspect of each school's suitability within this project. Options identified should therefore focus on innovative solutions which bring about maximum benefit at minimum cost, and which can achieve best possible value for money.

Void spaces

In many of the buildings, flooring over the large open (void) spaces in the upper floors of the buildings would provide valuable additional circulation / breakout space, which Victorian schools tend to lack compared with their more modern equivalents. Spaces which support learning away from the main classroom are vital for delivering the modern curriculum, and for providing one to one and small group support for children with additional support needs. As a result, where applicable, this is seen as a high priority for some schools.

Circulation/breakout spaces

Where additional space can be created, and also for existing useable spaces outside classrooms, opportunities for maximising the use and flexibility of these spaces needs to be explored, for example through innovative use of furniture, which can be used for a variety of purposes, including for supporting children with additional needs.

Outdoor space

In several of the buildings there is a requirement to improve the outdoor spaces, as well as the indoor spaces, to support curriculum delivery. Given that outdoor space at our Victorian school sites can be limited, it is important that those spaces are used as flexibly as possible, for example through providing covered outdoor spaces to help facilitate outdoor learning during periods of inclement weather.

Accessibility

Due to their design and layout, all of our Victorian school buildings present challenges for accessibility, when compared with modern day requirements. It is accepted that it is unlikely to be possible within the scope of this project to make the buildings fully accessible, but where opportunities arise for making changes to individual buildings which would also improve aspects of accessibility, these should be included within the list of available options.

Specific Priorities for Improvement

Listed below is a summary of the types of improvements which are required in our Victorian Schools, and which should be considered as priorities for the Feasibility Study:

- Floor over void spaces on upper floors to create more usable space
- Toilets – additional toilets to be located across the building (rather than all in one area)
- Flexible use of circulation spaces / creative use of furniture for additional support needs

- Outdoor space improvements – consider covered outdoor space
- Accessibility improvements
- General redecoration
- Improvements to temperature control
- Additional classroom capacity
- Improvements to security

Scope of Feasibility Report

The feasibility study should address the following:

- An outline of the options available to address the issues identified for each of the above buildings;
- The costs associated with each option;
- The benefits and limitations of each option;
- The challenges each option presents;
- Timescales for each option being delivered;
- Any Planning and Building Warrant constraints

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