

**Proposal to close the Sunnydale site of  
Greenfield Community College on 31 August  
2022 and rebuild the Newton Aycliffe site**

**Consultation period:**

**8 November 2021 - 19 December 2021**

## **1. Introduction**

Durham County Council keeps under review the number of pupils attending each school and updates information each year about how many pupils are likely to be attending schools in the future. This is an important aspect of the County Council's function in planning school places across the county to ensure there are schools of a suitable size to meet local requirements and to provide the best possible education for the pupils they serve.

The council realises that school reorganisation can be an area of concern as local communities often see a school as being at the heart of the community and sometimes cannot immediately agree with the need for change. Taking this into account, the council must continue to have a system of education that will bring about the highest possible standards of education for the children of County Durham for the short, medium, and long term and in some cases 'keeping things as they are' may not achieve that in this rapidly changing educational landscape.

In line with that strategic objective, the council is consulting on a proposal to close the Sunnydale site of Greenfield Community College on 31 August 2022. This will mean that all pupils attending Greenfield Community College will be taught on the Newton Aycliffe site. Significant additional funding to transform the learning environment for all children attending the school on the Greenfield site has been secured.

It should be noted that none of the options considered impact on the long-term future of the adjacent Leisure Centre and the plans for that are being progressed through the Leisure Transformation programme.

The consultation will commence on 8 November 2021 and end on 19 December 2021.

You may have some questions to ask. This document attempts to answer some of those questions and explain how you can let the County Council know what you think about the proposal.

## **2. Background**

Sunnydale Community College closed as a separate school on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014.

Following an Ofsted inspection judgement of 'inadequate', Durham County Council was asked by the Department for Education (DfE) to take steps to remove the unique reference number (URN) of Sunnydale Community College, in effect closing it. The council proposed that removal of the URN could be achieved by amalgamating Sunnydale Community College and Greenfield School into a single school, and in doing so ensure there continued to be education provision in Shildon. Consequently, following a consultation Greenfield School was enlarged from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, becoming Greenfield Community College, and Sunnydale School was closed as a separate school.

However, since May 2017, concerns about educational standards, an unsustainable budget projection, a steady decline in pupil numbers (particularly

those attending the Sunnydale site), and an accumulation of conditions backlog problems on both sites have made it necessary to review the options for education provision for pupils attending Greenfield Community College. External pressure caused by the government approved expansion of the University Technical College (UTC) South Durham, situated in Newton Aycliffe, has worsened the situation.

Split-site education, with pupils predominantly being taught on one or other of the two sites, continued from the amalgamation until January 2020 when health and safety concerns on the Sunnydale site brought about a consolidation of all pupils on the Newton Aycliffe site as a temporary solution.

### **3. Why is the Council proposing to close the Sunnydale site of Greenfield Community College?**

Officers believe this recommendation provides the best future option for the children, the school, and the communities it serves based on educational outcomes, pupil numbers, site issues and sustainable finances. Significant additional funding to transform the learning environment for all children attending the school on the Greenfield site has been secured.

Running a school across more than one site is expensive. One of the reasons that split-site schools are notoriously expensive is the additional burden in terms of leadership costs. Where two or more sites require leadership capacity to attend to health & safety, behaviour and safeguarding requirements, staffing costs rise substantially. The teacher contact ratio correspondingly declines directly affecting safeguarding and teaching standards.

In some situations, split-sites are used as an 'upper' and 'lower' school. While this does not substantially reduce additional leadership costs there may be other staffing gains and economies (i.e.: with an entire key stage on one site there would be the potential to create pupil groups of a more viable size). However, this was not the organisational solution chosen in the case of Greenfield Community College after amalgamation. There was no appetite for a parent/carer in Newton Aycliffe to have their child educated on the Sunnydale site and so the school opted to try and run a dual provision. The associated transport costs and inconvenience also made this option inappropriate.

Parental choice in Shildon has favoured schools other than Greenfield Community College in recent years. That has led to pupils from Shildon increasingly attending schools in nearby Bishop Auckland. The opening of the UTC in Newton Aycliffe has had a further impact upon pupil choice and numbers.

The 11-16 net capacity of Greenfield across both sites is 1750 and in 2017-18 there were 987 pupils on roll. There are currently 769 pupils on roll. The current pupil projections indicate that the pupil roll will peak at 794 in 2025/26 and thereafter gradually decline so that it will be less than 700 by 2029/30.

The Department for Education views the minimum size of a financially viable secondary school to be 600. Greenfield Community College's pupil roll is above this but across two sites the economies of scale are lost, putting the school under financial pressure. In recent Ofsted inspections (May 2017 and September 2019)

where the school was judged 'Requires Improvement', inspectors expressed the clear view that the delivery of the curriculum across a split-site was one of the factors delaying improvement in educational standards.

Repeated Ofsted inspections and Department for Education (DfE) advisers have identified the constraints that the split site accommodation has had upon educational improvement and progress. Subsequent improvements have been noted when all children moved onto the Greenfield site in 2020.

The tables below show the current and future pupil rolls for the South West Durham secondary pupil place planning area, locations for those pupils on roll at Greenfield Community College in September 2021, and the secondary school attended by those pupils on roll at primary schools in Shildon since 2018.

#### South West Durham Pupil Place Planning Area:

SCHOOL	Main Cap	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
UTC South Durham	400	219	237	311	311	311	311	311	311
Woodham Academy	1250	922	1013	1086	1153	1157	1148	1112	1090
Greenfield Community College	1754	818	756	731	717	707	738	775	741
<b>PA total</b>	<b>3404</b>	<b>1959</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2128</b>	<b>2181</b>	<b>2175</b>	<b>2197</b>	<b>2198</b>	<b>2142</b>

SCHOOL	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	2035-36
UTC South Durham	311	311	311	313	314	314	314	314
Woodham Academy	1073	1059	1054	1025	1022	1016	1015	1011
Greenfield Community College	708	687	679	652	645	646	646	646
<b>PA total</b>	<b>2092</b>	<b>2057</b>	<b>2044</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1976</b>	<b>1975</b>	<b>1971</b>

#### Locations for pupils attending Greenfield Community College in September 2021:

Location	Number	Location	Number
Newton Aycliffe	532	Eldon	2
Shildon	194	Stockton on Tees	2
Chilton	16	Durham	2
Ferryhill	7	Chester le Street	2
Darlington	6	Auckland Park	1
Middridge	5	Crook	1
Heighington	3	Coundon	1

Secondary school attended by pupils attending Primary schools in Shildon:

Secondary school	2018	2019	2020	2021
Woodham Academy	1	4	3	9
Sunnydale site of Greenfield Comm College	40	39	22	17
St. John's Catholic School Bp Auckland	19	15	29	30
King James 1 Academy	43	33	50	44
Aycliffe site of Greenfield Comm College	3	1	2	8
Bishop Barrington School	11	10	9	2
Out county school(s)	2	4	1	3
Ferryhill Business & Enterprise College	-	-	1	-
	<b>TOTAL 119</b>	<b>TOTAL 106</b>	<b>TOTAL 117</b>	<b>TOTAL 113</b>

Indications, therefore, from pupil data and Ofsted Reports show that decisions should be taken promptly to determine options for providing sustainable education of pupils attending Greenfield Community College, including future proposals for the Sunnydale site which is currently unoccupied.

#### 4. Which options have been considered?

The following four options have been considered and take account of the urgent need for future clarity resolving an effective and sustainable education for students attending Greenfield Community College, including a decision on whether this will be on one site or two. From these four options, the preferred option, and the proposal on which we are consulting is option 4 – close the Sunnydale site of Greenfield Community College on 31 August 2022 and rebuild the Newton Aycliffe site.

##### **Option 1: carry out remedial works to both sites and resume split-site education**

A feasibility report undertaken by the Council in December 2019, highlighted the critical need to renew the drainage on the Sunnydale site if both the repeated leaks and the vermin issue were to be eliminated. Windows required immediate replacement in two blocks; heating and pipework required renewal and replacement.

The estimated costs for the works identified in the feasibility report have been calculated at £4,843,154. This cost will only be what is termed a “sunk outlay” as it will address condition priorities but will not improve the school in terms of providing a high standard of education.

The Newton Aycliffe site, likewise, has conditions priorities amounting to £3.4m, as assessed in the most recent priority graded data taken from the commissioned independent Combined Summary Reports.

The total School Capital Allocation available to Durham local authority for 2021/22 for its entire school estate is £7.3m. It would take more than this full allocation to address the immediate condition concerns over just these two sites, without improving the learning environment.

However, there would be no justification in investing in remedial works on both sites and additionally funding improvements with a view to securing capacity for the future as the combined two-site capacity of 1750 far exceeds any projected future demand.

If this option was implemented, families in Shildon would have the choice of a local secondary school in their town, although only as part of a split-site provision. Over time there is the possibility that the steady migration of pupils to Bishop Auckland schools may cease, albeit if all pupils leaving Year 6 in Shildon's primary schools were to attend a split-site provision in the town. It would however still fall well short of the DfE recommended size for a sustainable secondary school.

Attempting to address remedial works on both sites with a view to retaining them as separate campuses and re-instating split-site education is not recommended due to the fragile financial position the school would be under, the strong arguments from the DfE and external sources about the negative impact of a split-site on educational standards, and the high costs involved in dealing with the condition backlogs across two sites. The projected pupil population for this part of the county does not warrant the preservation of a 1750 place educational provision.

### **Option 2: Build a new replacement school on a new site**

Both sites of Greenfield Community College have buildings which are beyond their natural lifespan. These factors alone justify consideration of building a new school to replace the existing one.

The Council completed a site option appraisal in April 2017 which identified two potential sites where a new school could be built in this part of the county. One was at Cobblers Hall Plantation and the other was off Middridge Lane. The appraisal identified that given the historic usage of both sites there was a high probability that mine shafts would be present and the land contaminated. These issues could impact on the suitability of the sites.

While a new school build would resolve the condition, issues considered in Option 1, the cost would be in excess of £25m plus land acquisition and the cost of demolition of the existing buildings.

Of all options considered, this is the one that would require most capital outlay. However, as the option requires land acquisition, and as this would be expensive even if a site could be identified, the difficulties of realising it are considerable.

### **Option 3: build a new replacement school on one of the existing sites (i.e.: Sunnydale or Newton Aycliffe) and dispose of the other site**

The April 2017 options appraisal rejected the option of a new build on the Sunnydale site due to the fact that a school large enough to accommodate all pupils would require the use of land on either side of the busy Middridge Lane. Although the size of school required is now smaller, the shortcomings of the existing site, planning and highways restrictions are made worse by the fact that only a very small percentage of pupils attending Greenfield Community College come from the Shildon community.

It is clear from the school destination data above that there is no justification for a secondary school in Shildon based on pupil numbers. If the current/projected trends in pupil numbers continue, it is likely that a new school on the Sunnydale site would become financially unviable because of this declining roll.

In terms of a new build on the Newton Aycliffe site, currently all pupils are being educated there while the Sunnydale site remains closed on health and safety grounds. Consequently, a new build would need to be undertaken with the school

remaining operational although the site would allow for any new build to be erected adjacent to existing buildings.

The cost of a new build school on an existing site identified in the 2017 options report was approximately £22.5million excluding demolition. Costs to include full demolition of existing buildings, asbestos control measures and site consolidation together with subsequent carbon compliance measures for new buildings plus inflation would increase that sum considerably.

Housing developments planned both at Newton Aycliffe and on the Low Copelaw site on the far side of the A167 may potentially yield in the region of 200 additional secondary school pupils in the Newton Aycliffe area over time. If this is the case, while there is spare capacity in Woodham Academy currently, and the UTC continues to expand, there may in due course be a requirement for additional places in Greenfield Community College and the Newton Aycliffe location would therefore be the most viable. There is insufficient growth of pupil numbers anticipated in the Shildon area, even with housing developments approved there, to justify the expansion of secondary school numbers in that planning area.

On grounds of cost and without the secure demand of rising pupil numbers to drive the requirement for a new school, this option of using either of the current sites to accommodate a new build is not recommended.

#### **Option 4: close the Sunnydale site of Greenfield Community College on 31 August 2022 and rebuild the Newton Aycliffe site (the preferred option)**

The Sunnydale site is unsuitable for remodelling and the cost of doing so, as it would involve major ground works, is prohibitive.

Despite the difficulties of the Newton Aycliffe site, the decision to locate all pupils temporarily there has allowed for a better standard of education although the learning environment falls well short of the best possible conditions for current pupils.

Governors, officers of the council and inspectors working for Ofsted and the Department for Education agree that a split-site arrangement will not support improved educational outcomes. Therefore, the decision to educate all pupils on one site still recommends itself as the best solution.

In this case, the only affordable option is to remodel/rebuild the buildings on the Newton Aycliffe site. This will include consolidating accommodation so that teaching and learning takes place in fewer blocks, the use of demountable classrooms is no longer required, and safeguarding is improved. The remodelled/rebuilt school will have a capacity for 800 pupils which is sufficient for current and future pupil rolls.

This option allows for the disposal of the Sunnydale site, which removes it as a liability and may provide a capital receipt, although the cost of demolishing existing buildings will need to be covered.

The cost of rebuilding the Newton Aycliffe site to accommodate all pupils in an improved educational environment is estimated to cost around £20m. This investment will significantly improve the current education provision and transform the learning environment for all children who wish to attend the school. The option to remodel the Newton Aycliffe site, accommodating all pupils in improved educational facilities and to dispose of the Sunnydale site is therefore the preferred option.

**5. Will my child be eligible for free home to school transport if the Sunnydale site closes?**

Wherever your child has a school place, the Council's home to school transport policy will still apply. This means free transport will be given to the nearest suitable school where the distance from home to school is over 3 miles. In addition to the Council's policy, for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or whose parents receive their maximum of Working Tax Credit, under national "extended" transport rights, free transport will be provided to one of the three nearest qualifying secondary schools if that school is more than two but less than six miles from the pupil's home address.

**6. What happens next?**

Any proposal for school reorganisations has to be carried out in accordance with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance. The council cannot take a decision to close the Sunnydale site of Greenfield Community College without having held a consultation on the proposal, which will include seeking the views of members of the public. The first stage of consultation will be informal and opens on 8 November 2021. During this period, Durham County Council will share its proposals with key stakeholders. This will include Governors and staff of Greenfield Community College, trade unions, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe Town Councils, local residents, young people, and parents of Greenfield Community College and of those primary schools in Shildon and Newton Aycliffe. The table below sets out the expected timescales for the process.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage</b>
8 November – 19 December 2021 (6 weeks)	<b>Consultation</b> All responses received by the closing date will be considered and included in a report for the council to consider and decide whether to take the proposal forward.
January – February 2022 (4 weeks)	<b>Statutory Public Notice</b> If the council decides to proceed with the proposal, statutory notices would be published in the local newspaper, posted on school gates and on the DCC website. These notices would provide an opportunity for comments or objections to be made.
April 2022	<b>Decision Making</b> Durham County Council's Cabinet would consider responses to the statutory notice and make the final decision on whether to agree the proposal or not.
31 August 2022	Sunnydale site of Greenfield Community College closes

**7. How do you respond to this consultation?**

We would like to hear what you think about this proposal. We will be hosting live events remotely via Microsoft Teams to explain the proposal in more detail and outline the different stages of the consultation process **on Tuesday 16 and Wednesday 17 November at 6.00pm**. If you would like to attend one of these live events, please type the relevant link address as shown below from 5.45pm on each



evening into your internet browser. Alternatively, the links will be available on our website at [www.durham.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation)

- <https://bit.ly/GreenfieldLiveEvent1> (Tuesday 16 November)
- <https://bit.ly/GreenfieldLiveEvent2> (Wednesday 17 November)

Although you will be unable to speak at the live Teams events, they will provide an opportunity for any questions you have to be submitted via the chat function and where possible, these will be answered by the officers present during the event. We will aim to answer as many questions as possible that you may have about the proposal.

In addition to, or alternatively to, attending the live Teams events, you can also respond in one of the following ways **by no later than 19 December 2021**:

- complete the online form at [www.durham.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation)
- email your views to [schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk](mailto:schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk)
- write to: Adam Williams, School Places and Admissions Team, Children and Young People's Services, Business Reply Service, Licence No DU63 (Freepost), Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5BR