



Information on the GCC website www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/new-special-school

The Brook Academy, Mill Lane, Brockworth, GL3 4ZN

Gloucestershire County Council has a duty to ensure there are enough school places within the county. Some children and young people have complex special educational needs that cannot easily be met within a mainstream school setting. We don't currently have enough special school places locally to meet demand so some children attend special schools out of the county or go to independent schools to have their needs met.

Therefore, we are establishing a new 80 place special school for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs in Brockworth, which is an area within reasonable travelling distance of Gloucester and Cheltenham. The school will admit its first pupils in September 2022. While focusing on SEMH needs, the school will also support children with autism and speech, language and communication needs.

The need for a new school of this type is underpinned by [Gloucestershire's High Needs Strategy](#), [the SEND Strategy 2022 - 25](#) and the [SEND Commissioning Strategy 2019-2024](#).

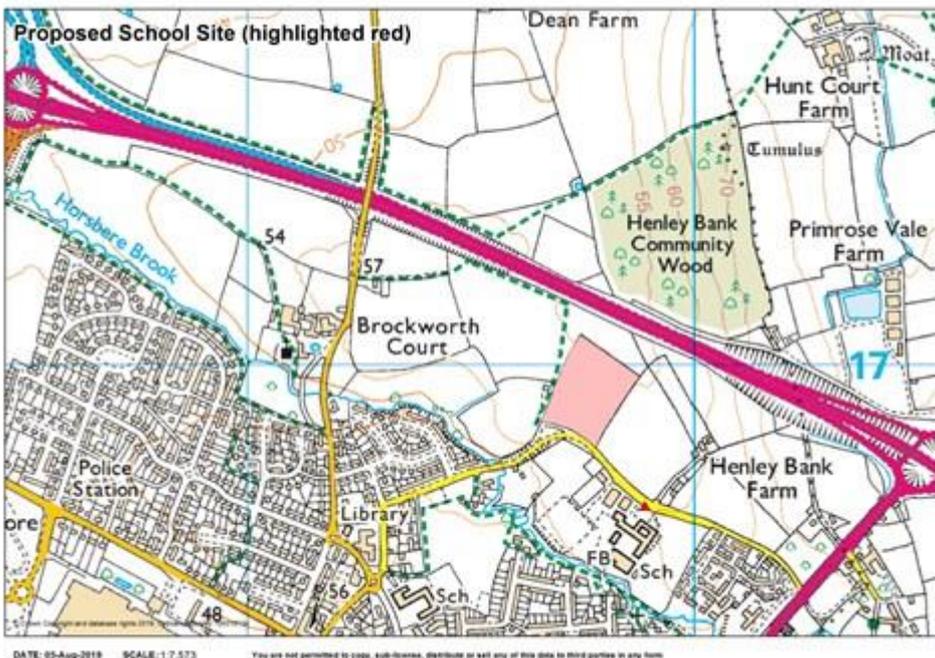
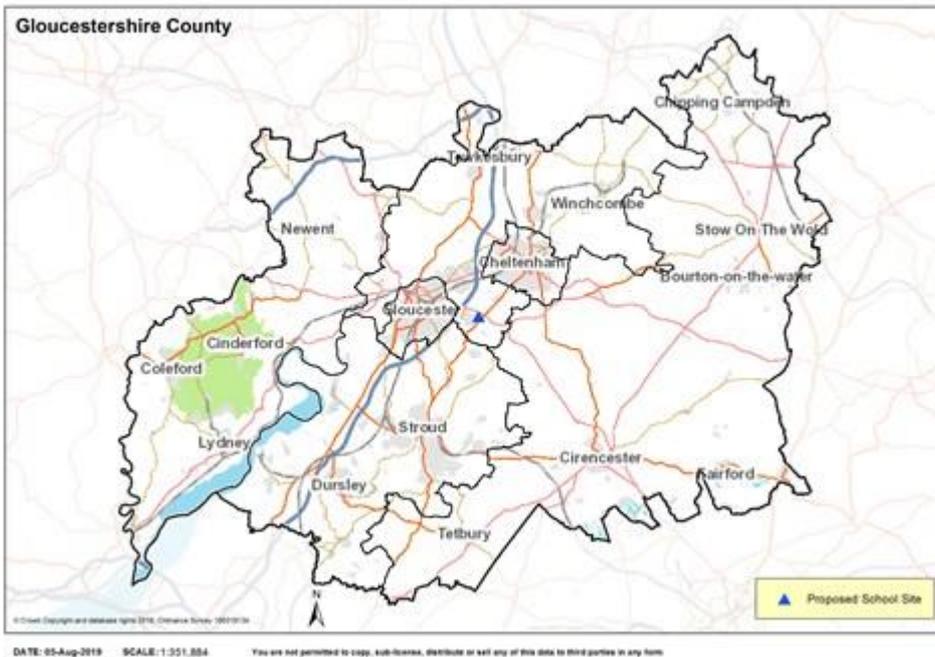
Community engagement: public drop-in event in 2020

A public drop-in event was held on Tuesday 8 September 2020 at Brockworth Community Centre which was widely advertised, well attended and gave people a chance to view the proposed designs for the school ahead of the application for planning approval. There were representatives from the principal contractors (EG Carters), the architect (Robothams), the sponsor (Learn@Multi Academy Trust) and Gloucestershire County Council were in attendance to answer questions and listen to any feedback on the school or designs. The proposals continued to be on display at the community centre until 15th September 2020.

Location

The school will be on Mill Lane, Brockworth, Gloucestershire, GL3 4NZ and is approximately five and a half miles from the centre of Gloucester and five miles from the centre of Cheltenham. There is easy access from these two urban centres given the proximity to the M5, the A4174 and the A46. The immediate area is undergoing significant development with 1500 homes planned as part of the Perrybrook development and a resulting investment in community and recreation facilities and the planned establishment of a new primary school.

The site is owned by Gloucestershire County Council, and was previously leased to Henley Bank High School who used it as playing fields and comprised of two sports pitches available for, but not much used by, the school and the nearby Sports Foundation. The school will ensure that the new sports facilities will be available for community use outside of school hours.



FAQs

Why has this particular location been chosen?

An analysis of where the current and future demand for special school places of this type is most prominent tells us that a location which can be easily reached from Gloucester and Cheltenham is needed. We aim to support the needs of children and young people with complex needs close to where they live. The proposed site also allows for easy access from Stroud and Cirencester given the proximity to the A46 and the A417 and is centrally located within the county.

In considering the most efficient use of public funds we first considered sites of a suitable size, and in the right part of the county for easy reach from urban centres of Gloucester and Cheltenham, that are already owned by Gloucestershire County Council, in preference over purchasing or leasing land. A desk top exercise to consider a number of options took into account that:

- The site at Henley Bank High School had been identified as a location for a special school previously, which had not progressed beyond the design phase. This meant that much work had already been undertaken in relation to surveys and feasibility
- Land at Churchdown and Chosen Hill Schools was considered but both were ruled out on the grounds that they were not as easy to get to. Being within existing residential areas made them limited sites on which to develop a new provision
- Land at Gloucester Academy was considered, however it was not felt appropriate to develop this type of provision on the wider campus of a school facing significant challenges of its own in terms of performance and quality
- Plans were already underway for the development of the former Bishop's College site in Escourt Road (Gloucester) so this was no longer available for this purpose
- The former Watermoor Primary School site in Cirencester was considered but ruled out on the grounds of the distance from Gloucester and Cheltenham, in favour of a location that is more centrally located to serve a county wide provision. Furthermore, whilst the land is owned by GCC the existing buildings, and key parts of the wider site, are not and the overall site was found to be of insufficient size to be fit for this purpose. The location of a scheduled ancient monument on the site and the sensitive archaeology also made this site unsuitable.

Were there similar proposals discussed a few years ago?

There were plans to locate a special school on the Mill Lane site a few years ago when the council was looking at providing new accommodation for a school called Greenfield Academy that was in unsuitable accommodation at Seven Springs. That school was run by AET, who also ran Millbrook Academy at the time. The proposal did not progress as it was decided to co locate Greenfield Academy pupils on the same site as another special school AET ran in Gloucestershire (in Cam). The planning application for the Mill Lane school development was therefore withdrawn and was neither approved nor rejected because the application was withdrawn before a determination was made. Shortly after the co-location of the two special schools on the same site in Cam the Department for Education re-brokered the academies and the Whitehorse Federation took over from AET. The two special schools on the Cam site have now merged (Peak Academy). A different academy trust all together has been appointed to run the new special school so is unconnected to the existing school on Mill Lane or Greenshaw Learning Trust (Henley Bank's current sponsor).

What are SEMH needs?

Social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) special schools support children and young people with a range of different needs, for example attachment issues, anxiety, depression, an eating disorder or ADHD. Sometimes these needs result from traumatic childhood events, or are a result of underlying medical conditions. There is a wide range of potentially contributing factors. The school will also meet the needs of children and young people with autism spectrum conditions and associated communication difficulties.

Why do these children need a specialist school?

Each child is different, but the national picture shows that most children with SEMH needs do not make the same level of academic progress as their peers, and by age 20 only 30 percent have a qualification. SEMH needs can lead to children becoming withdrawn and isolated or showing challenging behaviour, which can make it difficult for them to succeed in mainstream schools. This SEMH specialist school will help those children who can't currently reach their full potential in a mainstream school, and support them to return to mainstream education where possible.

It is important that the school is also able to meet co-existing needs which may include autism spectrum condition, speech language and communications needs and specific learning difficulties (as would be expected to be met in mainstream schools).

How will this school be different from a mainstream school?

This school will be much smaller than a mainstream secondary school. There will be 80 pupils in total from Year 7 to Year 11, so class sizes will be a lot smaller (typically around eight in size), and additionally

trained staff will be able to give students more tailored and holistic support for their needs. The school will not open with 80 pupils from day one, rather it will build up over time.

There will be a range of qualifications and courses on offer to suit different interests and strengths, including academic and vocational courses. For example, facilities will include a motor vehicle workshop, facilities for young people to learn construction skills and also a specialist room for hair and beauty and barbering.

Will the facilities at the school be available for community use?

The school wishes to make the facilities available for community use outside of school hours. This will include not only the sports field, but also the changing rooms, the sports hall and the external multi use games area. The school will also wish to make the other facilities such as the music recording studio and the motor vehicle workshop available to community groups that may be interested. Bookings and usage will be through a formalised arrangement made directly through the school.

Where will the local sports clubs play whilst the building work is going on and until the new school's sports facilities are available for community use?

From the earliest stages we have kept the sports clubs updated on the likely construction timescales. From our liaison with them we know they are actively planning for this period (likely to be from April 2021 to September 2022) and we understand that they have been exploring a range of other local alternatives and will keep their members updated. The two local primary schools have indicated a willingness to discuss the potential use of their sports pitches with local sports clubs. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the new sports pitches to the east of the proposed site (being provided as part of the facilities associated with the new housing development) will become available for community use during 2022. The pitch at the Brook Academy should be available to play on from October 2022 as work on preparing this part of the site started early in the construction phase.

Will the school expand in the future?

The school is being constructed to cater for 80 students when full, but will grow to this number over time and likely take three to four years to reach its capacity. If the demand for special school places of this type in this part of the county increases it is possible that the school will be asked to accommodate a greater number of children, although unlikely to exceed an additional three classes (or 25 children). The potential to expand the building, within the existing boundaries of the overall site, has been factored in to the design.

Are these children who have been excluded from mainstream schools?

The new school is not alternative provision for pupils who have been excluded from mainstream schools; rather it is a special school for children with complex and significant special educational needs. Pupils will have significant barriers to learning and may have experienced disruption to their educational history, possibly through exclusion as a result of behaviour linked to their needs, and are therefore likely to have gaps in their learning.

Who will run the school?

The school is being established as a special free school. This means that it will be an academy. In March 2020 the Regional Schools Commissioner confirmed their appointment of Learn@ Multi Academy Trust. This appointment has been made based on applications received from multi-academy trusts (MATs) as part of a nationally run free school presumption competition. The school is unconnected to Henley Bank High School or the Greenshaw Learning Trust. The Headteacher took up post in the spring of 2022, ahead of opening and in April 2022.

Who are Learn@ MAT?

Learn@ MAT is a small special school and Alternative Provision focused trust, based in Bristol, that has extensive experience in supporting children and young people with SEMH needs, as well as SLCN and autism, and in delivering inclusive education in a nurturing environment, enabling pupils to achieve SKILLS and confidence to equip them for further education, training and employment. We welcome this trust in joining us in Gloucestershire as partners in achieving the best possible outcomes for some of our most vulnerable residents. More information can be found about the work of Learn@ MAT and the other schools they run on their website www.learnmat.uk

Will this affect parking and traffic in the area?

As this will be a small school of up to 80 pupils, there should be minimal impact on parking and traffic. The majority of children and young people who attend the school will travel to and from it using council-arranged taxis and minibuses. The design of the site will include staff parking and provision for taxis and mini buses to enter the grounds at drop off and pick up times to avoid road side drop off and pick ups. It is critical to get the drop off and pick up arrangements in special schools right and this aspect of the school's operation will be very carefully planned so that, for example, cars are not queuing on to Mill Lane at the start and end of the school day.

There are confirmed plans, linked to the housing development, to widen Mill Lane. This will have been completed well before the school is due to open. The start and finish times of the school are planned to avoid those of the nearby secondary and primary schools in order to relieve traffic congestion.

Why does this school only go up to age 16?

There is very positive data to show that the vast majority of children successfully transfer from SEMH special schools to mainstream further education at the end of Year 11. In recent years high numbers of students at the existing SEMH school in Gloucestershire, The Peak Academy, went on to mainstream education at 16, and Learn@ MAT similarly has an impressive track record in this regard.

Further education colleges work with SEMH schools to provide students with regular taster days in Year 11 so they become familiar with a mainstream school environment, so their transition is well planned. Some colleges have also developed longer transitions for students up to a year before they start their course. Vocational options include apprenticeships and supported internships and there is sufficient specialist SEMH provision available at 16 if students aren't yet ready to join mainstream education.

How will the design, build and ongoing running of the school support the reduction in carbon emissions?

In September 2019 a motion calling for all new public buildings and developments in Gloucestershire to be carbon neutral was unanimously backed by county councilors. The county council is striving to become carbon neutral by 2030 and is identifying measures to deliver an 80 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions across the whole county by the same date. The design and build of the new school has strong green credentials and a specialist consultant has been engaged to inform decisions about the range of different approaches that can be taken. The options taken forward took into consideration what is appropriate for the site in question, the purpose and usage of the building and what is cost effective, taking into account ongoing maintenance and running costs.

Is there a public right of way across the proposed site?

There is a public footpath (ref EBW 63) that is accessed from Mill Lane at the entrance to the sports club car park and runs outside the western boundary of the proposed site for the new special school. It is also outside of the boundary of this site and runs through the adjacent sports foundation site / Brockworth Rugby-Football club, the sports pitch to the rear of their club house and then beyond in a northerly direction up to and then along the main A417 in westerly direction. The new special school development will not alter this footpath and there are no public footpaths or other public rights of way across the proposed site. The website <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/highways/public-rights-of-way/rights-of-way-online-map/>

shows the location of the public footpaths. The site will continue to be private land, as it is now, with no public rights of access without prior arrangement with the school.

Will there be further loss of hedgerows and trees?

An amount of hedgerow, as well as some mature trees, were lost along the southern boundary of the site to Mill Lane owing to the unconnected work being done in relation to highway improvements linked to the new housing development. In relation to the proposed school, it would have been necessary for us to remove a limited amount of hedgerow to allow for the vehicular access to the site and re-planting will be undertaken in order to offset any planned removal linked to the development of the new school in order to maximise biodiversity enhancement. Any planting that is undertaken in order to offset this loss will be of mixed native English species and appropriate to the local area. The planning approval submission is provided a detailed landscape strategy that was available for full inspection and review by all interested parties.

How will any safety concerns be addressed?

The safety of the pupils is of paramount importance and will be for the trust that runs the school. Therefore, the intention is to provide a site that has a secure physical boundary and in which entry to and exit from the site is carefully controlled. This will allow the children and young people to be able to benefit from the wider site as a whole, in the knowledge that they are kept safe and not able to leave the school site unaccompanied.

Will the school offer before and after school activities and will the term times be the same as other schools?

We would wish this group of vulnerable learners to experience the same opportunities at school as others so we would expect the trust that runs the school to look to arrange after and before school clubs typical to those found in most schools, but this can be difficult to arrange when children travel to school by local authority arranged transport. Whilst it will be for the academy to set its own term dates, we anticipate they will likely follow the same pattern as the majority of other schools and academies in Gloucestershire.

How will local people be involved as the project develops?

The academy trust and the design team have held information sessions and have provided regular updates to the community. The information sessions, held at the Brockworth Community Centre, enabled the local community to learn more about how the school will operate and their approach to meeting the needs of this group of vulnerable learners. The first of these drop in engagements events, which was widely advertised, was held on 8 September 2020 and there was a further one in September 2021. There was an opportunity for residents to look at plans for the school building and site and to provide comment.

We have, and continue, to keep the parish council up to date and we met formally with them in December 2019 and in June 2020 in addition to more recent informal updates from the Trust, the contractors and GCC officers. The GCC councilor for Brockworth also receives regular updates.

A planning application was submitted in October 2020 and planning approval given in March 2021.

When did construction start on site?

Construction commenced in May 2021, with on site preparation work commencing on 19 April 2021.

Where can I view the planning approval notice and information about any planning conditions that have been set?

Full details are available for review using the following link to the GCC Planning Portal:

https://ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/PROW/PROWWS.aspx/GetFileGCCContents?Filename=images%2f20_0054_TWR3MJ_DEC_NOT.PDF

Who is building the school?

A local family run Gloucester firm EG Carter has been appointed as the principal contractor.

Who can I contact if I would like to ask a question about this proposal?

Any comments or questions can be raised by e-mailing: SEMHSchoolproposals@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Or by calling Nathan Roe, Education Planning Manager on: 01452 427262

(updated July 2022)