

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

Establishment of a new special school in Gloucester

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document

1. The need for a new special school

1.1 Why is a new special school needed?

Gloucestershire County Council has a duty to make sure there are enough school places within the county for those children and young people who have complex special educational needs that cannot be met within a mainstream school setting.

We don't currently have enough special school places locally to meet demand and the number of children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has risen steadily year on year.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of children and young people with an EHCP</i>
2022	4906
2023	5467
2024	6120
2025	6540

Of the 6540 children and young people in Gloucestershire with EHCPs, 32% have needs that cannot readily be met in mainstream school and are placed at special schools (and colleges) in and outside of the county. There is a growing number of children who are being assessed as having their needs best met in a special school and a considerable proportion of the children for whom a special school is the best option, live in and around Gloucester.

There continues to be a projected increase in demand over the coming years and when we do not have enough special school places within the county, some children travel to special schools out of county or go higher cost independent schools, often some distance from home, for their needs to be met.

The need to increase the number of special school places is underpinned by Gloucestershire's [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) Strategy 2022-25](#) and the [SEND Commissioning Strategy 2019-2024](#).

1.2 Will this benefit children and families who live in the area of the school?

Yes. There are children living within Abbeydale, Abbeymead and the surrounding wards that require special school provision of this type.



The map below (figure 1) shows the location (as triangles) of three existing special schools that cater for a similar needs type to the one we are establishing in Gloucester. It also shows the location of the new school in Abbeydale.

Each yellow dot represents the 125 or so children with MALD, speech language and communication needs or autism, who have been assessed as needing a special school and who, in October 2024, is waiting for specialist provision to become available.

It is important to note that the numbers vary month to month, but there is a projected increase in demand and there continues to be a significant number of children living in and around Gloucester in this category.

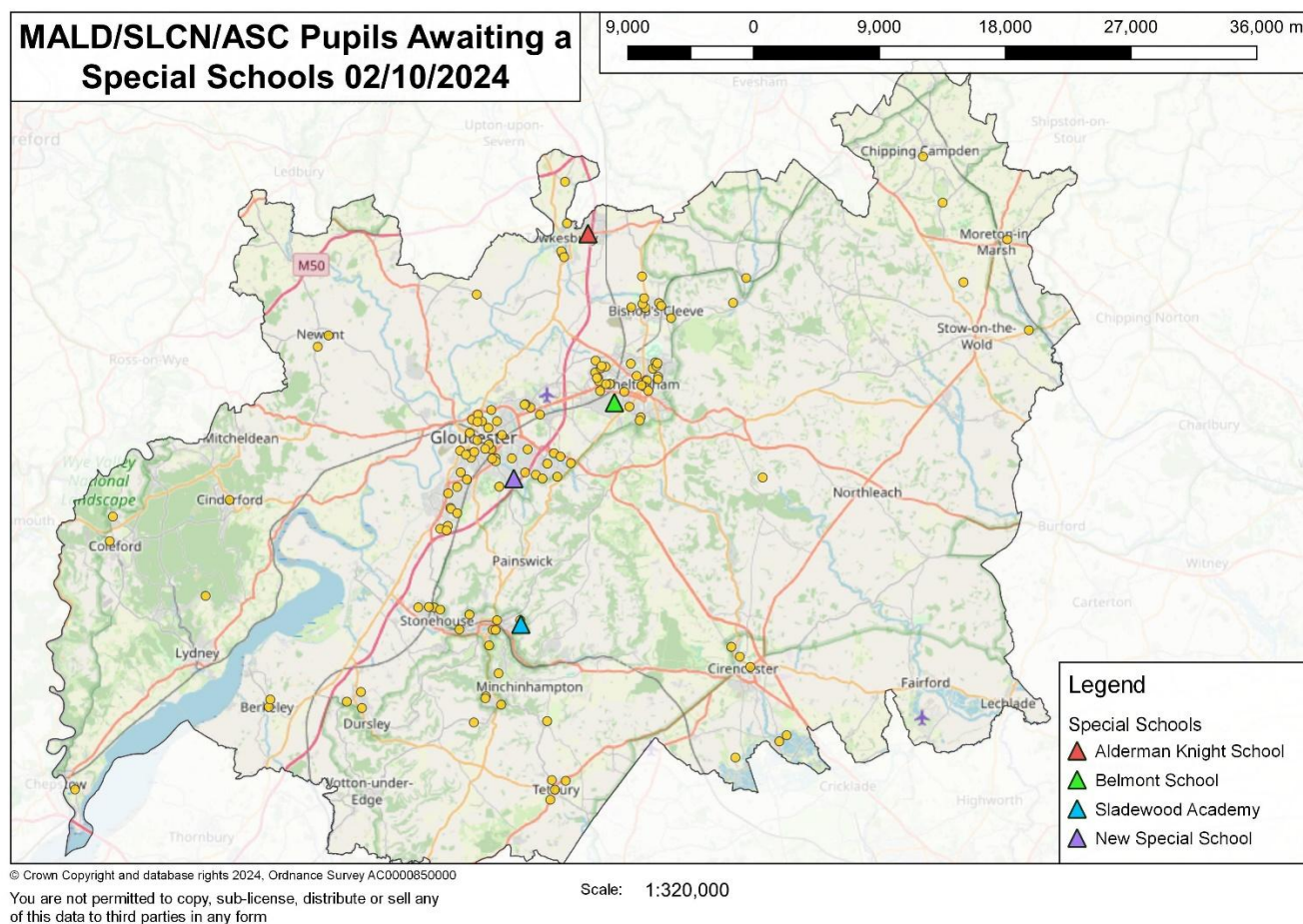


Figure 1- distribution of children and young people awaiting special school places – Oct 2024

Some of the schools close to the intended site also have a sizeable number of children with identified special educational needs. There are six primary schools and one secondary school within one mile of the proposed site (together educating in the region of 3000 children).

Based on 2023 school census data, the percentage of children with SEN at these seven schools ranges from 13.5% at the school with the lowest prevalence to 36% at the school with the highest prevalence. Five of the seven schools within one mile of the intended site for the new school have a higher prevalence of SEN when compared to the national average (which is 16% in primary schools and 15% in secondary schools).

The intention is that the new special school will offer outreach support to local schools in order to share their skills and experience.

2. Type of special school

2.1 What type of special school is being proposed?

The intention is to establish an 'all through' 200-place special school to accommodate the age range 4-16 years for children and young people with Moderate and Additional Learning Difficulties (MALD). Gloucestershire County Council will be working towards the school opening in January 2027.

2.2 What are Moderate and Additional Learning Difficulties (MALD)?

Children and young people with Moderate and Additional Learning Difficulties (MALD) need additional learning support as they may learn at a slower pace than their peers and will be performing well below expected levels for their age across the curriculum. They will have much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding concepts. They will have difficulty understanding instructions and the requirements of tasks, have difficulty understanding how they affect and relate to their immediate surroundings, find personal organisation difficult, and have difficulties with those visual and auditory memory skills which help us process information and instructions.

Alongside and in addition to their learning difficulties, children and young people with MALD may also have:

- complex speech language and communication needs (SLCN)
- Autism spectrum conditions (ASC)
- Behaviour that adults find challenging, arising from social emotional and mental health (SEMH) and/or conditions that impact on emotional regulation
- Physical, sensory and medical needs

In a special school context, children are typically taught in small classes of approximately ten to twelve children with two adults supporting them. There is a greater flexibility to group learners with similar needs and by stages of development rather than by age or year group alone.

2.3 What other schools are there in Gloucestershire are similar to this?

Whilst all special schools have their own unique character, the other state funded special schools in Gloucestershire that are most similar to this are Alderman Knight School in Tewkesbury, Sladewood Academy in Stroud (which opened in September 2023) and Belmont School in Cheltenham. Both Alderman Knight School and Belmont School are graded as 'outstanding' by Ofsted and have expanded in recent years, with additional classroom accommodation provided, in response to an increase in the number of children and young people requiring special school places.

Whilst we work with the special schools in our area to regularly review the type of support they offer and to be able to meet the needs of children and young people, this school will be the first special school in Gloucester focusing on supporting children and young people with MALD and the associated needs described above.

2.4 Are the children who will attend the new school children who have been excluded from mainstream schools?

No, 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 that makes their inclusion into mainstream schools challenging. Some children could be transferring from a mainstream school following assessment that their needs will be better met in a specialist setting.

2.5 Is this new school similar to the special school that opened in Brockworth in September 2022?

The new school will cater for a different need type to Brook Academy in Brockworth. That school is a secondary aged school for children and young people with social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs as their main area of need, who may also have autism spectrum conditions and speech language and communication needs alongside their social, emotional and mental health needs. The new school will cater for a different need type to Brook Academy.

3. Location

3.1 Where is it proposed to locate the school?

The intended site for the school is on land owned by Gloucestershire County Council accessed via Wheatridge East in Abbeydale, Gloucester. The overall site is approximately 2.3 hectares and is subject to a longstanding education use covenant, dating back to the 1980s, meaning the site is intended to be used for education purposes ie a school building and associated facilities. This intended educational use is set out in the approved Gloucester City local plan which, following extensive consultation, was adopted in January 2023.

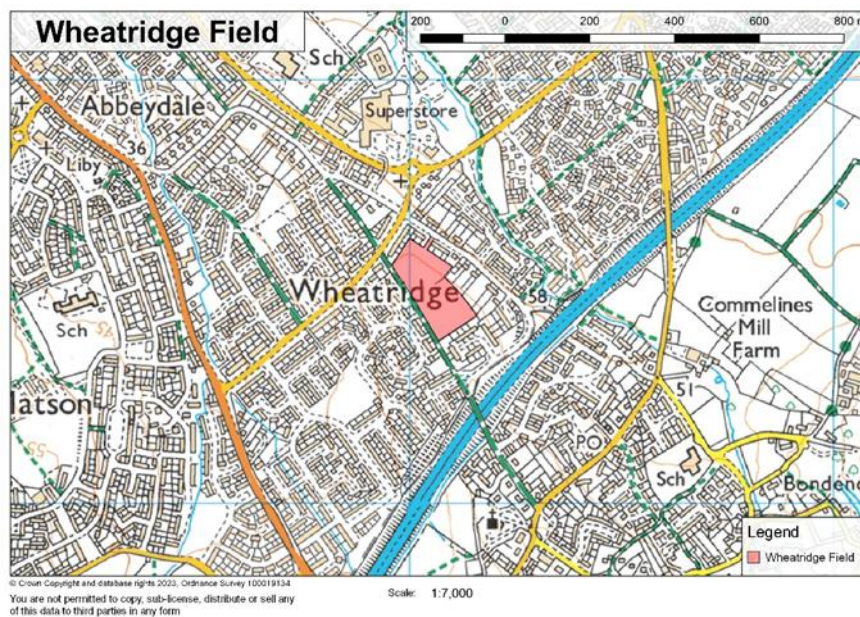


Figure 2: The Wheatridge site

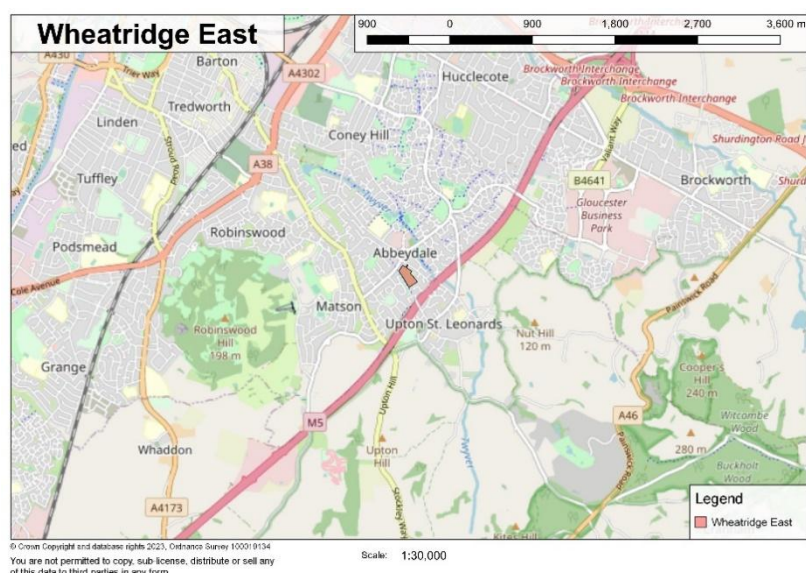


Figure 3: location of the site within Gloucester

3.2 Why locate the school in Gloucester?

Unlike Cheltenham, Stroud and Tewkesbury, Gloucester does not have a special school of this type despite there being a significant number of children requiring this provision. When considering the county wide picture of where there is a demand for special school places, as can be seen from the map below, there is a high concentration around Gloucester.

3.3 Why locate the school on this specific site?

Having identified that the area of greatest need for provision of this type is in Gloucester, a search was undertaken of suitable sites within Gloucester that were already in Gloucestershire County Council ownership. It is a much more efficient use of public funds to select a site already owned by the council rather than to purchase additional land, which would likely cost several million pounds. The timescales involved in finding and purchasing a suitable site would significantly delay the school from opening when needed, when there is a pressing need to provide special school places.

This site is already identified as a future educational facility in the Gloucester City Plan which, after extensive consultation, was adopted in 2023. Gloucester City's local plan was considered by an inspector appointed by central government who, having reviewed all the evidence, including all comments made by the public, concluded that the allocation of the land for these purposes was appropriate.

Alongside the fact that it has an education use covenant applied to it, the size and topography make it a suitable site on which to build a school (a special school takes up more room than a mainstream school). An additional factor which led to this site being selected is that it is within reasonable travelling distance to where there is a need, and we aim to support children and young people with complex needs close to where they live, and the proposed site has good access links being centrally located within the county.

4. Early Years and Post-16 provision

4.1 Will this new school include Early Years provision?

The new special school will be for children with EHCPs who are of statutory school age (ie from the Reception Year upwards). Most children who have yet to reach statutory school age, including those with additional needs, are successfully included within their local Early Years and childcare settings,

with additional support where required. There are six other special schools across the county who are registered to admit children in the Early Years phase. There is the potential, subject to the necessary approvals, to expand the provision available at the proposed new school in the future. [Information about the SEND Early Years Offer for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and the support offered by Gloucestershire County Council's Early Years team, can be accessed here.](#)

4.2 Will this new school include Post-16 provision?

There is very positive data to show that the vast majority of children successfully transfer from special schools of this type to Further Education (FE) settings at the end of Year 11. FE colleges work with the special schools in Gloucestershire to provide students with regular taster days in Year 11 so they become familiar with a Post 16 learning 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. Other post-16 vocational options include apprenticeships and supported internships and there is sufficient specialist provision available at 16 if students aren't yet ready to join mainstream education. There is the potential, subject to the necessary approvals, to expand the provision available at the school if the demand for onsite specialist post-16 provision increases in the future. [Information about the options available for children and young people with Special Educational Needs who are entering Post 16 education can be accessed here.](#)

5. Expansion and future special school places

5.1 Will the school expand in the future?

The school is being designed and built to cater for 200 pupils when full. However, it would grow to this number over time, and it will likely take two to three years to reach its capacity. The school might admit in the region of 70-80 pupils in its first year. If the demand for special school places of this type increases, it is possible that the school will be asked to admit a greater number of pupils, and the potential to expand the building, within the existing boundaries of the site, has been factored into the design. Any future expansion of the building will be subject to planning approval.

5.2 Isn't there an intention to establish another special school after this one? Why can't the council find a site that is big enough for both?

There is likely to be the need to significantly increase further the number of special school places available within the county before the end of the decade and officers are developing plans for a new special school to open in Arle (Cheltenham). The same rationale was applied when seeking a site of a suitable size in that we firstly considered land already within the ownership of the county council and close to where there is a concentration of need.

The reasons why an option of creating the required number of special school places all on one site has not been progressed include:

- a) that there is a demand in both the urban settlements of both Gloucester as well as Cheltenham and we want to make provision available across the county whilst also as close to where a concentration of pupils live as possible
- b) it is not yet certain that these further 200 places will be of the same needs type as the new special school to be located in Gloucester and opening in January 2027
- c) there is a pressing need to create additional places available as soon as possible and plans for the new special school in Cheltenham are not as advanced.

- d) special schools are, in their nature, intended to offer a smaller, less overwhelming and more nurturing environment. We would, therefore, not be considering a campus, on one site, catering for in the region of 400 pupils.

5.3 Why not just expand the other similar special schools that are in the county?

A number of schools have already expanded in recent years, and it is considered that existing sites are now at full capacity without the potential for further expansion. Special schools are, in their nature, intended to offer a smaller, less overwhelming and more nurturing environment. This, alongside factors around practical site constraints and where in the county the places are needed, needs to be taken account when considering increasing the number of places available at existing schools.

6. How the school will be run

6.1 Who will run the school?

The school will be established as a special free school, which means that it will be an academy. Gloucestershire County Council ran a nationally promoted competition to identify a suitably qualified and experienced Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to run the new school and made a recommendation to the Secretary of State as to which should be appointed. The full specification document that was issued as part of that process is available to view at www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/new-special-school-gloucester.

In February 2024, the Secretary of State confirmed Reach South Academy Trust as the trust that will run the school. This is the trust we recommended for appointment. Representatives from Reach South Academy Trust led a well-attended event on 22nd February 2024 where they introduced themselves to parents and carers of children with SEND as well as other stakeholders, including local residents. The slides from the presentation are available to view at: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/new-special-school-gloucester. Further opportunities to meet with the trust are planned between now and the school opening.

6.2 Why will the new school be established as an academy?

When the county council identifies the need for a new school in its area, it must ask for applications to establish an academy (free school) from academy trusts, and follow the guidance provided by the Department for Education. This is why we need to invite academy trusts to apply to run the new school rather than establish a local authority-maintained school. The role of the council is to establish the new school and hand it over to the academy trust to run once it has been set up. This approach is informed by central government policy.

6.3 Will the term times be the same as other schools in Gloucestershire?

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.

6.4 How will access to and from the site be managed?

The safety of the pupils is of paramount importance to the council and will also be for the trust that runs the school. Therefore, the intention is to provide a site that has a secure 2.4m boundary fence and a situation where 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 whole site, in the knowledge that they are kept safe and not able to leave the school site unaccompanied or encounter unauthorised visitors to the site.

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

The school will look to make the facilities available for community use if that is something that people who live locally would like.

7. Traffic and parking

7.1 Will 200 pupils mean 200 cars dropping pupils off?

No, the majority of children and young people who attend special schools travel to and from school using council-arranged multi occupancy minibuses and taxis. This produces much less traffic than a mainstream school where many more children are dropped off and picked up on the roadside by their parents.

We are using a transport consultant to assess and report on the likely impact on traffic from the pupil trips to and from the new school and this assessment was submitted as part of the formal planning application. All stakeholders had the opportunity to review that document as part of the planning process. Assessments suggest that the number of vehicles coming on to site transporting pupils is likely to be in the region of 70. Single occupancy vehicles for school transport are used only where necessary and, where possible, children will be grouped so that they can share vehicles. We are undertaking work across all of our special schools to review and combine routes where this is practical.

When undertaking the traffic and trip generation assessments, a worst-case scenario position has been planned for, i.e., that there will be a higher number of single occupancy vehicles than is likely to be the case.

The design of the new school includes provision for taxis and minibuses to enter the school grounds and drop off and pick up pupils within the school site, avoiding roadside drop-off and pick-ups. This aspect of the school's operation will be carefully planned to make sure vehicles are not queuing onto the road at the start and end of the school day and a lot of work has gone into this specific aspect of the design. With the firm intention that all vehicles will come on to site, we have designed waiting bays that can accommodate 72-80 vehicles to drop off and pick up children. Where pupils live locally there are opportunities for children and young people to be supported to walk to school or utilize public transport. Training and support for the development of independent travel skills will be high on the agenda for this group of pupils. Again, the traffic assessment is undertaken based on a worst-case scenario of where a child lives too close to be awarded Local Authority transport, parents will choose to drive their child to school rather than explore alternatives. We anticipate the number of pupils who will travel to school outside of multi occupancy LA arranged taxis and minibuses to be small.

7.2 Will some pupils be dropped off by their parents?

There will be some children who will be driven to and from school by their parents. This is either because they have not been awarded an entitlement to LA arranged home-to-school transport or because parents have chosen to undertake this themselves rather than accept the transport assistance. This is not expected to be a sizeable number, but allowance for this has been made in the transport assessment. Parents will also be able to drop off and collect on site as the onsite drop off and pick up bays will not be restricted to school transport vehicles only. In our experience parents of children with SEND will much prefer to drop off and collect their children in a more secure and

onsite setting, given the additional vulnerabilities of the pupils, rather than on the road. The school will be asking parents to use the designated one site drop off and pick up bays so they can meet and greet the pupils and parents.

7.3 How will the impact on traffic and local roads be assessed?

We are using a transport consultant to assess the impact on traffic and highways arising from the proposed new school and this assessment was submitted as part of the formal planning application that was submitted in June 2024. All stakeholders had the opportunity to review that document. Modelling and predictions around trip generation will be assessed based on a 'worst case' scenario. The impact on the local highway network arising from the proposed development was considered as part of the decision to give planning approval. The assessment also considered other approved but yet to be implemented nearby developments that could have an impact on traffic. Any future developments that are put forward for planning approval will similarly need to consider their impact on the road network and current traffic volumes at that time.

7.4 How many staff will there be at the school and where will they park?

Special schools have a high staff to pupil ratio, and there are usually additional staff not commonly found in a mainstream school such as therapists. Whilst it is for the academy trust to determine their own staffing model, based on comparisons with similar schools we are designing the facilities for 104 staff. But not all of these would be in at the same time. For example, cleaners are not usually in at the same time as cooks and lunch time support staff. Some staff will choose to travel to work by sustainable modes such as walking, cycling and public transport, reducing the demand for parking on site, however the importance of sufficient parking is well understood. The designs include 75 parking spaces for staff, alongside an allowance for visitor parking, and there is the ability to make use of some of the home to school transport waiting bays for parking outside of drop and pickups. We are intending to achieve parking for in the region of 90 vehicles to ensure that on road parking around the school is not needed. Details of how this will be achieved was included as part of the subsequent planning application.

7.5 What will be the impact on surrounding roads and will traffic calming measures be introduced locally?

Assessments indicate that the new school will not result in a severe impact upon the safety or operation of the surrounding local highway network. Whilst the school will result in additional day time vehicle journeys in the area, as set out in the assessment document, the impact of the proposed school in respect of vehicular trips be will limited to the morning and afternoon school peak hours only, with the majority of pupils arriving in prearranged taxis and minibuses using the same drivers on a day-to-day basis, and staff making the same journey each day, all of which are obliged to travel within the posted speed limit. Any assumptions made in the assessment about trip generation (for vehicles taking pupils to and from school as well as staff journeys) are based on a worst case scenario and, in reality, we are expecting that there will be fewer vehicles than planned for as the Local Authority school transport team work hard to group children together in order to maximise sharing of people carriers and minibuses rather than rely on individual taxis and, through its travel plan, the school will be supporting and encouraging staff to car share, cycle and use public transport where practical to do so. Traffic calming measures such as speed bumps or chicanes are not proposed as a result of the new school. However, the decision will ultimately be that of GCC Planners reviewed the results of the surveys submitted and weighed them up against the tests of planning obligations and the advice of the GCC Highways Officers.

8. The design and build

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

In line with Gloucestershire County Council's Climate Change Strategy to reduce the Council's emissions to net zero by 2030 the building is designed to achieve net zero emissions associated with the running of the building. We have used a specialist consultant to help make decisions about the range of different approaches that can be taken to ensure the design and operation are as sustainable as possible. These include:

- A building that is orientated and formed in a way that is intended to reduce heat loss and also limit solar gains which cause overheating.
- Night cooling which will limit overheating, along with automatic CO2 sensors to support ventilation and cooling, without the use of air conditioning.
- A building with insulation and air tightness levels that will well exceed requirements and help to make this an energy efficient building.
- Building services which are fossil fuel free and where all heating and hot water generation will be by air source heat pumps.
- Energy efficient LED lighting is planned for throughout with automatic on/off motion controls and daylight linking to avoid lights being left on unnecessarily.
- A 100% offset of regulated energy consumption through on-site electrical generation from PV (solar) panels on the roof.
- A resulting EPC rating for the building of A+.

8.2 How many storeys will the building have?

There is a strong commitment to ensure a high level of on site parking, so this means that there will need to be a two-storey element to the building. The building will not be two storey throughout and the design ensures that the two storey elements are further away from the nearby residential properties.

8.3 Will the school take up the whole of the site, or will any part of the site be retained as a footpath?

There is a lot to accommodate within the site in terms of the necessary outdoor learning, recreation and play spaces for pupils alongside the necessary parking. However, as the designs have progressed, it has become clear that it is possible to accommodate a footpath that will run along the perimeter of the site providing a connection between Wheatridge East and The Ash Path. This will enable a circular walking route to be taken around the external boundary of the school and along The Ash Path. There were requests from people who live locally, from the earliest stages of the project, to include space for, for example, dog walking.

This will mean positioning the perimeter fence of the school site a minimum of three metres or so from the existing boundary fences of the properties on The Wheatway, The Wheatridge East, Simpson's Orchard and Georgian Close. Whilst, in places, a strip of vegetation alongside existing boundary fences may need to be removed to make way for the footpath we will look for opportunities to avoid that. The existing vegetation that will run along the school boundary fence (on the school side of the fence) will be retained and enhanced. This will create some shielding between the residential properties and the school grounds and offer privacy for the children.

8.4 Will measures be put in place to ensure the necessary habitat areas for wildlife?

A dedicated habit area is planned for. This is to encourage and attract wildlife generally but also to help us achieve the biodiversity net gain that the planners will look to see. Outside play and recreation areas and being able to learn outside of the classroom will be important for this group of children, and we are looking (in addition to the dedicated wildlife area) to include bird boxes for common and widespread species, swift boxes, sparrow boxes, hibernation spaces and bat boxes. We will also be looking to retain as much of the existing vegetation as possible around the perimeter of the site, supplementing this and filling any gaps. A full ecological impact assessment has been carried out as part of the design process. The results of this were available to review as part of the planning approval process. We will be seeking to achieve as much of the biodiversity net gain as possible onsite. Details of the landscaping and the management of this continue to be available to review on the planning portal via this link <https://planning.gloucestershire.gov.uk/publicaccess/> (just type Wheatridge into the search box).

8.5 Will there be a gap between the boundary fence of the school and the existing boundary fences of the residential properties to main rear access where that exists and allow for maintenance of fencing?

Yes, please see the answer to the question '*Will the school take up the whole of the site or will any part of the site be retained as a footpath?*'. There will be a 3m or so distance between the 2.4m high weld mesh metal fence that is the secure school perimeter boundary fence and the boundary fences of the properties. This area can be accessed in two places via the Ash Path as well as from Wheatridge East. Whilst creating a circular route for walking around the outside of the site, it also enables a way for people who live in those properties to maintain their fences and continue to access any rear access points. Details of the boundary treatments continue to be available to review on the planning portal via this [link](#)

8.6 Who will build the school?

Gloucestershire County Council invited the contractors who are on its major works framework to bid for the opportunity to be principal contractor for this design and build project and E G Carter and Co Ltd were subsequently appointed. Carters are a long standing, local Gloucester based family run firm. Carters have subsequently appointed Robotham's Architects to lead the design process. Both have worked on several similar projects on behalf of the council and bring recent and relevant experience in delivering school buildings. Ground works have been largely completed by the end of August 2025, and the steel frame will start taking shape in September 2025.

8.7 Has the planning application been submitted?

Yes, an application for planning approval was submitted on 7th June 2024. All of the assessment reports and associated documents are available to view on Gloucestershire County Council's public [access planning portal](#). Planning approval was given in November 2024. The decision notice can be viewed [here](#).

8.8 When will construction work commence and how long will that last?

Construction commenced in June 2025 and is anticipated to be completed in January 2027.

8.9 Is the school opening later than planned?

Yes. It had originally been intended that the school would open in September 2026, but this has been revised to January 2027. The delay resulted from the need for the Council to obtain separate

consent for the diversion of existing unregistered footpaths across the site, following an application made by a local resident.

9 Previous proposals for the site

9.1 Were proposals to use this site as a location for a primary school discussed a few years ago?

There was a proposal a few years ago to establish a mainstream primary school on this site. This was a proposal submitted to the Department for Education by The Crypt School (a grammar school in Gloucester) and was to establish a primary free school. However, the scheme was withdrawn due to lack of sufficient demand for additional primary school places. This current proposal is a Gloucestershire County Council led project and unconnected with previous proposals.

9.2 Are there still plans to use part of the site for housing?

Whilst the Gloucester City Plan shows an allocation of approximately ten residential dwellings on this site, alongside a school, an analysis of the space that is required to provide the necessary amount of classroom and external space (with scope for future expansion) indicated that the whole site would be required for the school. Gloucestershire County Council intends to devote the whole site for the purposes of the school and not make any of the land available for the ten dwellings referred to in the Gloucester City Plan.

10 Keep up to date with the project.

Version 1: 06 July 2023
Version 2: 03 August 2023
Version 3: 04 September 2023
Version 4: 27 September 2023
Version 5: 31 October 2023
Version 6: 20 December 2023
Version 7: 2 February 2024
Version 8: 12 April 2024
Version 9: 17 May 2024
Version 10: 7 June 2024
Version 11: 4 October 2024
Version 12: 12 May 2025
Version 13: 28 August 2025
Version 14: 26 February 2026