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PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

# Major Redevelopment of Exeter High School

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*Presented to Her Excellency the Governor pursuant to the provisions of the  
Public Works Committee Act 1914.*

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Legislative Council

Ms Rattray (Deputy Chair)  
Mr Valentine (Chair)

House of Assembly

Ms Butler  
Mr Tucker  
Mr Wood

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	3
2	BACKGROUND.....	3
3	PROJECT COSTS .....	5
4	EVIDENCE .....	6
5	DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE .....	18
6	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION .....	19

## 1 INTRODUCTION

To Her Excellency the Honourable Barbara Baker AC, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its Dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY

The Committee has investigated the following proposal:-

### **Major Redevelopment of Exeter High School**

and now has the honour to present the Report to Your Excellency in accordance with the Public Works Committee Act 1914 (the Act).

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This reference recommended the Committee approve works to undertake a major redevelopment of Exeter High School (EHS), with the aim of redeveloping and refurbishing selected buildings on the school campus to provide a contemporary learning environment. The provision of such facilities aims to enhance the school's collaborative teaching and learning practices, complement the school's unique learning model, and support the EHS vision to be a "country school with a contemporary mindset".
- 2.2 EHS teachers have undertaken significant professional development in recent years. The result has been the implementation of highly developed, authentic learning experiences, effective teaching strategies and rich curricula, based on the philosophy that every person has the capacity to learn.
- 2.3 EHS has a strong professional learning culture where staff collaboratively plan learning programs and develop teaching strategies that ensure the school can cater for all learning styles and levels. Staff operate in grade teams and have become experts in grade-specific curricula, creating consistency of practice across the school.
- 2.4 The school's teachers have developed pedagogical practices and a curriculum which has improved student learning growth and achievement, based on collaborative teaching practices and building a strong feedback culture. Providing facilities that will maximise the benefits of this approach has been the main driver in planning the contemporary facilities of this redevelopment.
- 2.5 EHS has a core learning model in place where students do most of their learning in one General Learning Area (GLA) and have key engagement with one teacher. This encourages the development of positive teacher-student relationships in the school, and has created calm and orderly classrooms. Despite these positive benefits, the configuration of the school, especially the GLAs, does not support contemporary learning practices. The physical teaching spaces are dated, and many have not been updated since the construction of the school in 1985. The

learning spaces are not connected, which inhibits the ability to encourage open and collaborative teaching and learning.

- 2.6 Reconfiguring the current infrastructure to better support quality teaching and learning is critical for EHS to continually improve educational outcomes for all students. The proposed works have been developed to provide contemporary teaching and learning environments that can support and build on the success of the school's pedagogical approach and core learning model, to maximise educational outcomes for the school community.

### 3 PROJECT COSTS

- 3.1 Pursuant to the Message from Her Excellency the Governor-in-Council, the estimated cost of the work is \$11 million.

The following table details the current cost estimates for the project:

Description	Cost Estimate (\$'000)
New and Refurbished Building Works including Staging Provisional, Escalation Allowances and Market Loading	7,508
External works including landscaping, paving and undercover walkway upgrade to selected areas and a new bus shelter	817
Construction and Design Contingency	855
Furniture and Equipment, including IT	520
Consultant Fee Allowance	792
Statutory Authorities Allowance	80
General Contingency and Post Occupancy Allowance	68
DECYP Project Management and Administration Allowance	280
Artworks	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,000</b>

The Department's submission did state:

*"The proposed scope of works fits within the available budget".<sup>1</sup>*

However, the Department also acknowledged the challenging construction market environment, with its submission noting:

*"The cost estimate accounts for escalation and pricing/market risks currently being experienced by the Department across all capital projects in all regions..... Tender documentation will allow for itemised pricing to assist in addressing the current market risk conditions. To ensure the budget is not exceeded, minor elements of the scope could be removed such as less renovation works and restriction of exterior improvements. This will be further tested through the design process prior to tender".<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Exeter High School – Major Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Department of Education, Children and Young People, 7 March 2023, page 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, page 11.

## 4 EVIDENCE

4.1 The Committee commenced its inquiry on Tuesday, 7 March last with an inspection of the site of the proposed works. The Committee then returned to Henty House, whereupon the following witnesses appeared, made the Statutory Declaration and were examined by the Committee in public:-

- Ben Frerk, Principal Exeter High School;
- Min Harman, Manager Capital Works, Department of Education, Children and Young People;
- James Morrison, Architect Consultant Morrison and Breytenbach Architects; and;
- Todd Williams, Director Facility Services, Department of Education, Children and Young People.

The following Committee Members were present:

- Mr Valentine (Chair)
- Ms Rattray
- Mr Tucker; and
- Mr Wood.

### Overview

4.2 The Department's submission outlined the priorities for the proposed redevelopment:

- *Redevelopment of the existing Years 7-8 hub to include contemporary formal and informal student learning, breakout and staff office spaces, storage, and service upgrades. The redevelopment of this hub contains the renovation within the existing footprint to accommodate eight dedicated GLA spaces.*
- *Redevelopment of the existing Years 9-10 hub to include contemporary formal and informal student learning, breakout and staff office spaces, storage, and service upgrades. The redevelopment of this hub will include a small building extension to accommodate eight dedicated GLAs.*
- *Minor external changes to the library hub including a paved patio, roofed pergola and installation of a new sliding door.*
- *Partial redevelopment of the existing MDT, art, and culinary arts hub within the existing footprint to accommodate a new entrance / arts exhibition area, an upgrade of a visual arts and kitchen areas with refurbished benches and fittings, and development of an adjacent courtyard/outdoor learning space and service upgrades.*
- *Redevelopment of the existing antiquated north side toilet block to provide individual cubicle facilities in conjunction with external improvements including access ramp and covered outdoor space.*
- *Partial landscaping and site work to activate and support the redeveloped building hubs/learning spaces. Works include new ground surface treatment to replace existing*

uneven pavers in Courtyards 1 and 2 and a bus shelter off Glen Ard Mohr Road adjacent to the existing bus layby.

- Other minor improvements are subject to a favourable tender outcome including the development of a meeting room within the existing Administration block.<sup>3</sup>

### **Pedagogical Approach and Learning Model at EHS**

4.3 The Committee understood the redevelopment would focus on providing contemporary learning areas to support the school's teaching and learning approach. Noting this, the Committee sought further information from the witnesses on the school's learning model and how it benefits students:

**CHAIR** - ... You talk about the school has collectively developed a 'Teacher Learning Community', based upon high expectations and created conditions for teachers to understand their own impact on student outcomes, et cetera. Do you want to expand on that?

**Mr FRERK** - That basically means that we've worked really hard on developing the preconditions for school. Those preconditions are paramount to successful learning and successful teaching. There are certain things that need to happen for teachers to be able to teach and students to be able to learn, and that's what we have worked hard on. We've worked hard on building the capacity in teachers to make sure they can provide opportunities, but we've also really built on those cultural aspects within our kids that they come to school with the attitude that they want to learn. That metacognition in regard to understanding themselves as learners and understanding how certain ways to behave, so those sorts of things can happen.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Could you also put on the public record the initiative that you have at your school around the longer lesson times and the value that you believe that creates for students and teacher relationships?

**Mr FRERK** - Yes. Exeter High School is structured a lot differently to traditional high schools. Our timetable consists of three 100-minute blocks. So, our students operate in a core classroom. They do their English, maths, history, science and health all in one group with a smaller class, so they develop those direct connections with minimal teachers and they're not transitioning across the school - that maximises the time they're actually engaged in learning.

The benefits from this are that the school is extremely calm, which allows students that have an array of learning disabilities, anxiety and those sorts of things, to come to school and to function and to make the most of the opportunities that we provide.

... Those sorts of stimulations of movement and chaotic areas in the school, if you can minimise those sorts of things, it allows kids to concentrate on what they are able to do. One of the things that we pride ourselves on is that kids can come to school and just be themselves. That's something we have worked really hard on.

... If we have an environment where it is calm and it's collected and where people feel safe, then, what's the product from that? It's learning.

### **Scope of the Redevelopment**

4.4 The Department's submission outlined how the scope of the redevelopment had been determined:

As part of the design process, the PWG's [Project Working Group] focus has been to address the highest priorities of the school and fulfil the agreed design principles. This

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid, page 7.

includes offering students contemporary teaching and learning spaces which support learning needs, and student social opportunities and wellbeing.

The project budget was set prior to the COVID-19 pandemic when the cost of building was significantly lower. This led to a process of establishing priorities to define a final scope of works and keep the project within the project budget, with a focus on refurbishing facilities that best supported the school's educational program into the future.<sup>4</sup>

- 4.5 In their verbal evidence, the witnesses reinforced that the school's priorities were redevelopments focused on generating the best outcomes for students, which would be achieved by providing a contemporary learning environment that is flexible and adaptable:

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... The \$11 million Major Redevelopment of Exeter High School is an exciting project for the school and the community. The focus of that project is providing contemporary learning environments.

...

...Having met with the school and the school association to have these open, frank conversations, those conversations were about ensuring we focus on the priority areas - which we continue to do; and that's around the learning environment.

...

.....From a building perspective, the buildings from the past did not easily provide those areas. So, in part of the proposal we are talking about those additional spaces to support individuals, which is a key focus of today and future learning.

.....A key part of the design that we have for this school and a key part of contemporary learning are those flexible differing size spaces that you can adapt and meet the needs of the students.

...

**Mr FRERK** - ... The priority area for me is to provide the best possible facilities that we can for our kids, that 100 per cent of our kids utilise every day.

- 4.6 While the school has a learning model where students have a core classroom for the majority of lessons, the configuration of the school means this is not possible for all year groups. Currently year 9 classes are not structured in this way, with students moving around the campus for their lessons. Therefore a focus of the redevelopment is improvements to the general learning areas, by providing a year 7-8 learning hub and a year 9-10 learning hub. Mr Frerk expanded on this at the hearing:

**Mr FRERK** - Basically, the current layout at school doesn't allow for four learning hubs. It only allows for three and, unfortunately, the year 9s are that group that their classrooms are a bit scattered around the school so they feel disconnected as a group. They are a bit disconnected from their teachers. As you saw when we were walking around the school, in the rest of the school the classes are situated around each other. They have access to a breakout area and then access to their teachers. That's why it is paramount that we allow those kids that facility so they feel connected and part of the school.

**CHAIR** - Year 9 is a pretty important year when they are first starting to probably seriously think about what they're going to do in their career. The last thing you want them to do is to be thinking, I am not going there, it is not very welcoming, and I'll go and get a job somewhere.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 7



No-one would want that. So, you are going to create a space that is specifically for them to congregate and to enjoy each other's company and interact?

**Mr FRERK** - Yes. The new 9 and 10 hub will basically connect them together, but it will also connect them with the year 10s as well, allowing them that continued space to operate in, to conduct their learning, which is going to be supportive of them developing as a person.

- 4.7 The Department's submission notes "the design opens the individual buildings, so they relate to each other, the central courtyards, and external spaces. This will create a connected school where students and staff see and experience the activities and learning of others leading to a vibrant and engaged school"<sup>5</sup>. The Committee asked the witnesses to expand on how the redevelopment would achieve this:

**CHAIR** - You mention on page 8 the open buildings and connected courtyards, and we were talking about the way some of the new spaces will work. Teachers will have a greater opportunity for passive observance or surveillance as we might call it -but it sounds a bit harsh - of the student body. Could you describe a little more how that is going to change from what is there now?

**Ms RATTRAY** - Supervision?

**Mr FRERK** - ... Supervision is just one aspect. It's giving students the opportunity to learn in different ways, because learning has developed so rapidly over the past five years and over the past 20 years. One of the things we need to do as a school is to complement the continued advancement in education. That's why we have worked hard on our teaching expertise and that's why they are at the level now where the current facilities are outdated in how we want to approach learning to make sure we are maximising the learning opportunities for kids.

**CHAIR** - Certainly, as we walked through we could see the age of the school and some of the signs of the work needed to be done, so I can understand that.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - If I may just add there, the internal courtyards at the moment aren't used and we want to bring that in as a space for learning, and then also connect with the outdoors. Classrooms can't do that at the moment. Yes, there are options inside the building but there is also a courtyard and external area to use as well.

**Mr MORRISON** - As I was saying, I call them 'blind courtyards', because you can't see into the buildings. We are opening it up so you can see into the buildings and the buildings can see into the courtyards. It's part of that whole idea of passive surveillance but it's also about creating community. If you can see other people, you feel like you are part of a community. And that helps create that sense of community.

**CHAIR** - There was that observation when we were talking at the school about how that might work two ways. It might work as a distraction for students, if they can see out more. You said that's not a particular problem. Do you want to explain that a little?

**Mr FRERK** - As I mentioned before, if you put those preconditions in place and those expectations on learning, and students understand why they're coming to school and why learning is so important, those sorts of things negate themselves.

As I said, when we were walking around the school, the kids are constantly used to people coming in and out of the classroom and we want to know what they're doing. We want to know what the teachers are doing. It's something that is just part of the way of being.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - And the environment we create is important. We think about all that concrete and Besser Block that we saw when we walked through the school; personally speaking, it would be much nicer to have some more windows or doors and those things from an environmental perspective.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 8

4.8 The Committee questioned the witnesses on what elements of the proposed works had already been removed or reduced in scope due to budgetary constraints:

**Ms RATTRAY** - I would like to talk about the proposed work and put on the record the items that have been listed for this proposal and the ones that were left off. The library hub - I presume that's part of the one that was left off?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Correct, yes.

**Ms RATTRAY** - And the antiquated toilet block - there is an upgrade, but not a complete upgrade. Can we have that on the record?

**Mr MORRISON** - There were two and now we will be doing one.

**Ms RATTRAY** - What about the external improvements, including access ramp, covered outdoor space? Do they get a guernsey?

**Mr MORRISON** - Those are still in. We're only partially changing the access ways, those barrel vaulted things that aren't really effective... ..and they direct the water on to you as you walk underneath them.

... .. We are not replacing all of them as we were hoping to do in the beginning. We are replacing the ones around the main courtyard.

**Ms RATTRAY** - But they won't be in the same type of material as what's already there?

**Mr MORRISON** - No. We're keeping the metal structure, because we can reuse it. We're taking off the plastic and putting some purlins on top of that and then some roof sheeting on top of that, so it becomes more like a traditional verandah and is a much wider shelter area... and it will have a gutter so it takes the water away and doesn't spill down on top of you.

**CHAIR** - Are you doing anything with that water?

**Mr MORRISON** - We were hoping to do something with the water but again budgetary concerns, it is going to go straight into the stormwater system.

**Ms RATTRAY** - You can't put in some tanks to use for some reuse water for the landscaping aspect?

**Mr MORRISON** - It all costs money. We're concentrating on the learning areas.

...

**CHAIR** - ...And the MDT space? Clearly, it's a significant space. No doubt there are lots of things you might wish for in terms of the tools and amenity that a space like that might have, but how do you see it improving their lot?

**Mr FRERK** - It's disappointing that those sorts of things can't all be done but those sorts of facilities are still adequate to support the options that students choose, and we clearly and carefully design our teaching and learning programs around those optional facilities. The priority area for me is to provide the best possible facilities that we can for our kids, that 100 per cent of our kids utilise every day.

4.9 The Committee noted that a partial redevelopment of the Material Design and Technology, Visual Arts and Culinary departments would be undertaken to create an interconnected hub housing these areas. The Committee asked the witnesses to expand on these works:

**CHAIR** - ...it's a partial reorganisation - so, can you describe exactly what that's going to achieve?

**Mr MORRISON** - We're taking the visual arts out of the block where the 11 and 12s are, so it gives them more space; and then they are co-locating with the MDT and the culinary cooking area.

... We are freeing up a bit more space in that block. Ben and the school have expressed their desire to have visual arts and MDT coming together because there's some interplay between the two.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - And have an exhibition area to display the works, as well as making the entrance compliant and the like.

...

**Mr MORRISON** - It also has more specific applications like, for instance, upgrading the kitchens. The kitchens that are there are very much orientated towards domestic science in the old days ... We are now talking about teaching for the catering industry, basically.

**Mr TUCKER** - Career orientation.

**Mr MORRISON** - Yes, career orientated. It's a pathway to the catering industry. When you are trying to teach that in a domestic kitchen, it doesn't quite match up.

- 4.10 The Committee understood a bus shelter would be built as part of the redevelopment. The Committee questioned the witnesses on the need for the bus shelter and how it would function:

**Ms RATTRAY** - I have a question about the bus shelter off Glen Ard Mohr Road. Is that a school-owned facility?

**Mr MORRISON** - There is no bus shelter at the moment; it is at the entrance. There's a bus turning area, which is on the school grounds, but the students have to stand in the rain in winter and wait for the bus. It is a very simple structure, but basically it's a shelter. In the blazing heat in the summer or the rain in winter, it's just a simple bus shelter.

**Ms RATTRAY** - But it's an Education Department facility?

**Mr MORRISON** - Yes.

... It's not for general buses, it is for school buses.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - ... That came through in our school engagement with the students - 'can you please build us a bus shelter?'.

**CHAIR** - In terms of the numbers using that shelter, are we talking about a third of the student population that would go through that?

**Mr FRERK** - We are probably talking about 98 per cent.

**CHAIR** - ... Parents aren't coming and picking their kids up?

**Mr FRERK** - No.

**Ms RATTRAY** - How are we going to fit 98 per cent of the students under one bus shelter?

**Mr FRERK** - The buses come in pretty quickly, so we can get some of the kids onto the buses and then they stay there for 20 minutes until 3.20. The rest of the kids congregate.

- 4.11 Having toured the school, the Committee recognised the need for improvements to be made to the outdoor courtyard spaces. The Committee asked the witnesses what work would be done to improve the safety and usability of these spaces:

**CHAIR** - ... We heard today from the students, the external paved areas of the school. We pointed out the trees that are growing in the courtyard space - how are you going to cope with that? Are you going to take the trees out? You're repaving and you're going to somehow improve the circumstance where the roots are almost coming up through the paving. Can you just cover how that's going to be addressed in this development?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - The outcome there will be to ensure that there is a safe environment for the students to enjoy the outdoor courtyard. At the moment there are some hazards that have to be managed on a regular basis.

**Ms RATTRAY** - The trees are going to get bigger.

**Mr MORRISON** - The trees are a good asset to that space, so you wouldn't want to be taking those out. It's quite a big courtyard so we can give the trees a bigger berth with the paving and still have a decent sized courtyard.

**CHAIR** - You will need seating under those trees, too?

**Mr MORRISON** - Yes, and you would want to integrate some seating with it as well. The landscape architect will work on that. One thing about the courtyard, it does have planting around the edges and that does tend to separate the courtyard from the buildings. We will probably be taking out some of that planting around the edges - so, there is going to be plenty of space. We are not short of space.

- 4.12 The Committee noted the cost of external works had increased since November 2022. In particular, the Committee sought to understand how the landscaping element of the external works would be managed:

**Ms RATTRAY** - ... There's a significant increase in the cost of the external works, including the landscaping. ... You talked about 'a staged approach will provide guidance on how to implement the plan over time'. You have an estimated cost, increased from the first iteration to the second, so I am interested in how you can have a staged approach to costings when you already have a budget set down? I am interested in how that might unfold.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - The conversation we had around the master plan today, and then for the works project, and then focusing on what is deliverable under the works with the funding availability; it's a similar comment. We have developed a master plan for landscaping, and then it is 'what do we achieve with the budget that we have', and how do we set the school up to continue to enhance that environment?

**Mr MORRISON** - The crux of it is that the landscape plan is not all funded by the budget, but it can be implemented slowly by the school over time. Basically, we are giving them something which they can do over 10 years but we can only fund the first little bit.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I am sure they have the right structure and they have the vision and progressively - whichever way.

**Ms RATTRAY** - So you are expecting Ben to be able to make provisions in the future for ongoing landscaping costs, out of his allocation?

**Mr MORRISON** - We're doing the important things.

... The basic infrastructure, the important bits are there; but we are talking about the things that are ongoing, things like extra landscape planting and that type of thing which you can do as a school.

**Ms HARMAN** - The more manageable elements of the landscape master plan.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Schools are generally always aware and looking for opportunities to partner, to access grant funding, to do projects and the like. Is that a fair comment, Ben? Then there is opportunity for them to do it.

- 4.13 The Department's submission highlighted some identified priorities may be unable to be completed because of market conditions and budgetary constraints. The Committee sought further information on what impact the outcome of the tender process may have on the final scope of the redevelopment:

**Ms RATTRAY** - I have a question around the good old catch-all on the bottom there:

"Other minor improvements are subject to a favourable tender outcome including the development of a meeting room within the existing Administration block."

What do we call that? Pie in the sky?

**Mr MORRISON** - No. The tendering climate at the moment is very difficult to get it right, so we build in a bit of flexibility. If you notice, we had our meeting today in the library. It means you have to walk all the way through the school. That's not ideal for Ben wanting to meet visitors, and so forth. The one small project within the bigger project is creating a meeting room with admin area. I know that's not an absolute must, because it has a meeting room in the library - but it's not ideal. If there's additional money left over, we will put it in a tender package as a separate item and if it comes in over budget, we will take it out; or if we are lucky and we get a little tender price, we can leave it in.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - At this stage it is within the estimates that we are being provided and it is within the plans that are there. But it is, as you say, a catch-all because we are still a little while away from going to tender and finding out from the market what their tender prices are.

**Mr MORRISON** -... the project will be phased because the school has to be able to shuffle things around to continue working. The tender will come back in at least four stages, so, if necessary we can knock out an end stage if we have to. I am hopeful we're not because we have done this to death.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Perhaps it's best if I give a little more information. The estimates that we have now are based on a quantity survey in November/December last year. Before we go to tender, we'll also be checking in as the plans progress and we get more detailed plans, so there is more detail for the quantity surveyor to estimate. We'll do that again before we go to tender. That's a check for us that we are still on track and moving. The final check is the actual tender themselves when they come in. So, there is no certainty in that, because it is a movement. What we are seeing in the market at the moment from the tender results that we are receiving - and we receive tender results weekly, fortnightly because we have a variety of packages - they have stabilised. That is in there because there is an element that is unknown.

...

**Ms RATTRAY** - We've already talked a bit about the Brighton School development, and even though it's hard to talk about, it is real. That has gone almost 50 per cent over budget. It's alright to have those conversations but if it is going to blow out the price, then what we look at as a committee on behalf of the Tasmanian community is nowhere near what is going to happen in reality. How do we marry that up? We all want to see new infrastructure, but we also understand that we don't have an endless pit of money. Those contractor conversations - I'm not sure what you have had with the Brighton developer? I expect it's a pretty hard one, but they've won and the state hasn't.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - They are independent tender assessments that go through all the appropriate government procurement rules. The key part with Exeter is that the \$11 million will make a significant improvement to the learning environment. It's certainly been challenging to have to reduce scope; however, the priority remains, and I am comfortable we will deliver significant improvement for learning. The market is challenging, unprecedented. However, with regard to Exeter, I'm comfortable that we can deliver some significant benefit.

**Mr TUCKER** - ... I will follow on with this. You mentioned that there were four phases to the tendering. Is that correct, James?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - We have to work that through. It depends on four stages of work in regards to the works package. We have to stage the work to keep the school safe and operational. Whatever package that we come up with based on the tendered result, we will deliver; we won't be reducing stages. It's how we manage that works package to keep operating a school.

**Mr TUCKER** - What happens if the first stage tender comes in, like the Brighton High School tender, at a lot higher rate than what we're expecting? And then, the budget is \$11 million, what will happen to the other three stages?

**Mr MORRISON** - No. All the stages are tendered at once, and then one contractor will do all the stages but they will happen sequentially.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - If we get a tender result that is above what we expect it to be, then we have to reassess.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Back to Treasury, or back to the minister, or both?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Yes; or back to the Department. They are the three options that we have, in consultation with the school, considering what the result looks like and the extent of that. I'm hopeful that we are well positioned because the advice we have is the current advice, and we've made those decisions along the way.

Brighton has been more challenging because you can't half build a school or three quarters build a school; you have to build a school.

There are two ways to define a scope of a project - an outcome that you want or a fixed amount of money that you want.

...

**Mr TUCKER** - It would be fair to say that phase 4 of the tender process mightn't get up?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - There will be packages of work that we tender that will be separate portions and when we get the tender results we will then make decisions on what that means. I am hopeful that we get a good tender result and we can do more.

**Ms HARMAN** - Lately we have had a couple of more positive ones.

**Mr MORRISON** - It has improved a lot this year, compared to last year.

### **Industry Capacity to undertake the Redevelopment**

4.14 The Committee sought the witnesses understanding of the current construction tendering environment and the capacity of the construction industry to undertake the redevelopment:

**Mr TUCKER** - The next question is around this tendering; how much work is in the pipeline? Are we targeting this tendering process at the moment, with this school, so that there is capacity within our construction industry to do this work? We want continuity of work but I get the feeling that we might be overloading our construction industry. Do we need to - ?

**Ms RATTRAY** - Then they put the price up.

**CHAIR** - Because they don't want the job, because they have too much on.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I regularly participate in forums with Infrastructure Tasmania and we share our pipeline with them. They regularly release the 10-year plan and I understand there are forums with industry on those. Every one of the projects that Min and her team are progressing at the moment is in the Future Opportunities website so contractors are aware of what is coming up and when they are coming up. We're certainly still receiving tenders, so it's an indication to us that they are still wanting to do our work.

**Mr TUCKER** - That leads to another question. I've seen this with some of the roads, where you don't receive a tender at all or you receive one tender. How many tenders are we getting on jobs at the moment and how many are you envisaging for this school project?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - We are certainly getting fewer than we did five years ago. Min is probably able to talk about this as well. There is an element of the unknown. The information we are getting at the moment is the market has capacity to respond to this tender. Our team is regularly engaged with industry. We regularly work with them as well.

**Ms HARMAN** - We probably have four or five contractors in the Launceston region who we can reach out to, pre-tender. The other thing we've recently done in busy times is be reasonably open-ended on a completion date. We're saying that we will review and assess the tenders that we get; we're not saying we have to have it by the 2025 school year. Of course, we would

love that, or half way through that school year, but we know that it will put some tenderers off.

**Mr TUCKER** - So you're envisaging four building contractors coming forward?

**Ms HARMAN** - It is hard to see but there are a few mid-range builders in the Launceston region who could be interested in this.

**Ms RATTRAY** - Have there been any attempts to try to broaden how many of those businesses are available, those construction companies? They have to reach a fairly high bar. I'm not saying lower the bar, but sometimes a business might need some support to meet the bar. Has there been any work in that area so there are more tenderers available?

**CHAIR** - Or even making them more aware, perhaps, that there are jobs?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I understand through Infrastructure Tasmania and through Treasury as well there have been connections with industry and workshops about how we can support industry, how we can make sure material availability is suitable for the projects that we are doing. There have been discussions for at least the last 24 months about an acknowledgment of the state of the industry and how we work together to deliver the outcomes. It is a challenge. There's no doubt about that. The key part for us is that we are still receiving our tenders and we are still connecting with industry. We haven't, that I can recall, had any submissions where we haven't received submissions. It's an indication to us that industry wants to work with us.

...

**CHAIR** - ... time lines: major changes there anywhere?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Time lines are always under pressure. There's an element of the unknown, as we talked about, when we tender and the industry respond on their capability to deliver.

**Ms HARMAN** - And we balance up the tender prices and the programs we are given.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - This is what we believe we are comfortable with; but again, there is the element of unknown.

### **Continuing School Operations During Construction**

4.15 The Committee was aware that it can be difficult to continue operating without some disruption during construction. The Committee asked the witnesses to detail how this would be managed:

**CHAIR** - ... Staging of classes during construction - is that a problem?

**Mr FRERK** - It is going to be a rigorous conversation that we have. It's one thing we will do and we will do it well to maintain learning and maintain student safety. There are plenty of people in the Department, principals that have been in this situation before that I can talk to. That's something that we will work towards. Over the next couple of weeks, I have a conversation with my leadership team on how we will manage that, and then we will re-meet. There is a PWG [Project Working Group] and we will say okay, this is what we're thinking we can manage at a school level, what is the feedback you can give us to say that this would be a good way to do it?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - It's important to say it is front and centre in everything we do, making sure there's a safe environment.

**CHAIR** - I was wondering whether there might be any particularly tricky circumstances that you have to cope with. It doesn't seem like it.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I think because Exeter has a little bit of space, a bit of spare space.

... Where you are at capacity, that is a challenge because you don't have anywhere to move to.

**Mr MORRISON** - You can get to the building from the back end in each case. It's always difficult when you have a dense school and you have to get through teaching areas to get to your building site. In this case you can go around the edges, so it makes it simple in that respect.

### **Consultation and Community Acceptance**

4.16 The Committee recognised this project was scheduled to come before it in November 2021, however, this was delayed at the request of the Department so that further school and community engagement could be undertaken. The Committee sought further detail from the witnesses on the reasons for the delay, what had occurred during this time and if there was broad acceptance within the community of the scope of the redevelopment:

**CHAIR** - ... .. Clearly, this particular development is something that has been a while coming. Can you talk to the fact that this is the second submission and you might tell us why that is the case, for the record? We realise that this did come forward in November. Is that correct?

**Ms HARMAN** - That is correct.

**CHAIR** - If you can cover why there has been that hiatus and the reasoning that was behind that.

**Mr WILLIAMS** - The Exeter High School Redevelopment Project was announced in 2021 through the state budget, and we have been working ever since that announcement to reach this point. We always endeavour to progress a project as quickly as we can whilst trying to ensure we get a quality outcome, and there is a balance to that. Through that process late last year and following further advice from our quantity surveyor, it highlighted a little concern that we had in fulfilling the plans we wanted to deliver. We needed to consider that advice and we also needed to consult through the school association and the community. We didn't want to rush and provide something to the committee that wasn't quite right. We wanted to make sure that our messaging was right and, importantly, we wanted to engage with the community on that, so we took that time to postpone. Thank you for allowing us to do that and to do that consultation through November, December and January. February was a return to work, return to school focus and we are now in March and here.

**Ms RATTRAY** - ... .. I am interested in a summary of that additional community consultation because my understanding is that this is exactly the same in version 2 as what we had in version 1. I am interested in what those issues were, or if there was nothing from the community input, for the reason for holding it over?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - Absolutely. The community consultation report that you have in the submission was that initial community consultation that we undertake as part of a lead into any of our capital development projects, and that is to engage, listen and feed that information into the project. The discussion that we wanted to have - and what we did have - was what we could not have hoped to originally provide. We had to reduce slightly. There were some elements that we needed to reduce, and they were the works to the library area, the scope of works to the kitchen area and a toilet amenity that - based on the latest quantity surveyor advice at that time - we could not produce. So, we needed to pause to have that discussion with the school, with the school association, and then we also released that amended works plan to the community for feedback during January. The feedback we received was supportive, however limited.

**Ms RATTRAY** - I suggest that January is not an ideal time to seek community feedback. I'm not saying that the Exeter community is not a very engaged community - I dare not say that - but, people are often away on holidays. Are you absolutely satisfied that the community is on board with this revised plan that has been put forward, because there are a couple of significant areas of redevelopment that have been wiped, from what we see?

**Mr WILLIAMS** - I certainly am, and Ben might like to contribute as well.



.....He lives and works in that community. To respond, I agree that January isn't an appropriate time. However, I also tried to progress the project to get the benefits for the students. We are almost two years into the project and we want to keep moving, so I acknowledge that; but also trying to keep moving to deliver positive outcomes is challenging.

.... Acknowledging the timing wasn't quite right; but also, I believe that the message had got out widely through the community and the discussions we had were positive and accepting about delivering the key outcomes of the learning areas.

**Mr FRERK** - I agree with what Todd's saying. The bulk of that work and communicating was done in 2022, towards the last term of the year. I'm all about transparency, and I want the community to be involved and to understand the decisions that we have had to make to ensure that we are providing the kids with the best possible educational facilities - not only now, but for the next 25 years.

**CHAIR** - You're satisfied that the community has a very good understanding as to what's trying to be achieved?

**Mr FRERK** - Totally satisfied. It's given me some very positive feedback. I got some positive feedback during the advertisements that went public during January and that has proceeded into this year as well. So, very happy.

#### **Does the Project Meet the Requirements of the Public Works Committee Act?**

4.17 In assessing any proposed public work, the Committee seeks an assurance that each project meets the criteria detailed in Clause 15(2) of the Public Works Committee Act 1914. Broadly, and in simple terms, these relate to the purpose of the works, the need for and advisability of undertaking the works, and whether the works are a good use of public funds and provide value for money to the community. The Committee questioned the witnesses who provided the following confirmation:

**CHAIR** - ... does the proposed works meet an identified need or needs or solve a recognised problem?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works the best solution to meet identified needs or solve a recognised problem within the allocated budget?

**WITNESSES** - Yes. We believe we have gone through a thorough process to get to this point.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works fit for purpose?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Do the proposed works provide value for money?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Are the proposed works a good use of public funds?

**WITNESSES** - Yes.

## **5 DOCUMENTS TAKEN INTO EVIDENCE**

5.1 The following document was taken into evidence and considered by the Committee:

- *Exeter High School – Major Redevelopment*, Submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, Department of Education, Children and Young People, 7 March 2023.

## **6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Committee is satisfied that the need for the proposed works has been established. Once completed, the proposed works will deliver a contemporary learning environment, designed to complement the school's unique core learning model.
- 6.2 The proposed works will be student focused, with elements of the redevelopment prioritised within the budget to maximise student learning outcomes. As a result, the works will primarily centre on redeveloping the school's general learning areas to facilitate the contemporary approach to open and collaborative teaching and learning, and will allow the school's learning model to be extended to all year groups.
- 6.3 Accordingly, the Committee recommends the Major Redevelopment of Exeter High School, at an estimated cost of \$11 million, in accordance with the documentation submitted.

**Parliament House  
Hobart  
1 May 2023**

**Hon Rob Valentine MLC  
Chair**