

## Statutory Consultation on the Expansion of Polden Bower School

This document outlines Somerset Council's proposed expansion of Polden Bower School in Bridgwater, and sets out how members of the public can provide their views.



This is a statutory consultation by Somerset Council in accordance with the DFE's 'Making Significant Changes ('Prescribed Alterations') To Maintained Schools' guidance issued in August 2025

## Background

Polden Bower School is a foundation special school located at Bower Lane in Bridgwater.

The school opened in 2021 following the amalgamation of Elmwood and Penrose schools, and was originally registered for 200 pupils.

Due to the success of the school, and a large demand for specialist places locally, the governing body of the school has admitted many more pupils than this number onto its roll.

In partnership with the governing body, Somerset Council is proposing an expansion of the school.

There are two aspects to the potential expansion:

- Proposal one - the creation of four additional classrooms on the school site, providing an additional 32 places
- Proposal two - the creation of 'satellite' provision at a local primary school (Somerset Bridge Primary School at Stockmoor Drive), providing an additional 16 places.

The proposals, if agreed, would increase the number of places at Polden Bower from 200 to **248**.

This paper is designed to set out the proposals, and explain how members of the public can provide their views.

## Proposal One: New Places at Bower Lane

Proposal One is the creation of an on-site expansion at the school's main school site.

### What is being proposed?

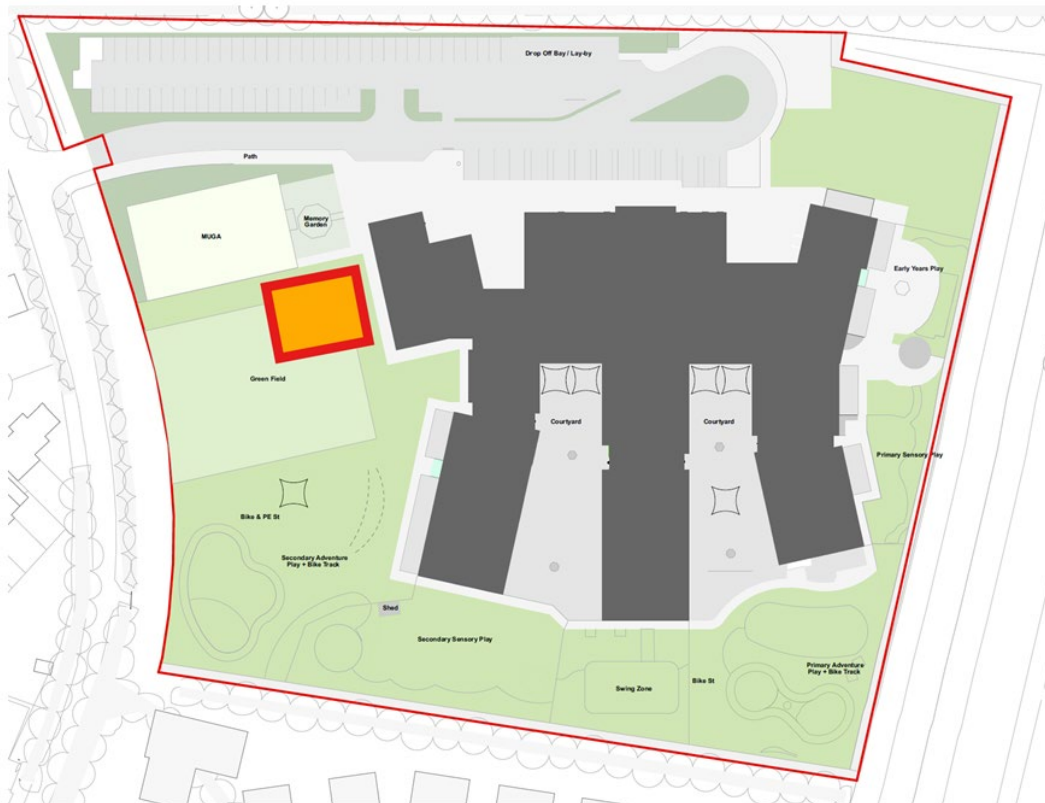
Somerset Council proposes a new building on the Bower Lane site that will have four new classrooms, providing the school with 32 places.

### Why is a new building needed?

There is currently a shortfall of specialist education places in the county. Most of the existing special schools are oversubscribed and full to capacity.

## Where will the new building be located?

The new building has yet to be designed although it is likely to be constructed in the orange area shown on the following plan:



## Who will the new school places cater for?

The new places will cater for local children that have education, health and care plans that set out their special educational needs, in just the same way as the school's existing places.

The proposed expansion would provide places for some new children, and some would represent 'backfilled' places, as the school is already heavily oversubscribed. This means it would help meet the school's existing needs as well as future needs.

### Proposal Two: New Places at Somerset Bridge Primary School

## What is a special school satellite?

A special school satellite is an extra part of a school that is located in a different building or on a different site rather than on the main school grounds.

## Why are places being considered at this school?

Off-site satellites can be a good way of creating additional places for a special school.

Somerset Bridge Primary School at Stockmoor Drive in Bridgwater has some spare accommodation that Polden Bower can use for pupils that live locally.

### **Would satellite children be on the roll of Polden Bower School or Somerset Bridge Primary School?**

The children would be on the roll of Polden Bower School. The provision would be run by the same headteacher and school leadership team, and would follow the same policies and standards as those at the main school.

### **Will Polden Bower children integrate with the children on roll at Somerset Bridge Primary School?**

In general, it will not be appropriate for children to be taught in mainstream classes with children from Somerset Bridge Primary School. However, there will be some inclusive learning opportunities and/or joint social activities that are planned by staff from both schools.

### **What happens when children reach the end of their primary education?**

Each child's individual circumstances would be considered at an Annual Review meeting although it is likely that most children would transfer from the satellite at Somerset Bridge to the main school at Bower Lane following the completion of year 6.

## **General Questions about Both Proposals**

### **How will the new places be allocated?**

As with all places at the school, any new places will be allocated by Somerset Council's Statutory SEND service in consultation with leadership at the school.

### **How will the new places be funded?**

Somerset Council has received capital funding from government to increase the number of 'high needs' places. It wishes to make a substantial investment at Polden Bower School which it recognises is significantly oversubscribed.

When the new places are open, the school will continue to receive additional revenue funding which will cover the school's additional operating costs.

### **Will the expansion affect other schools in the area?**

It is unlikely that other state-funded schools will be affected as there are so few vacancies at special schools in the county.

### **When will the new places be ready?**

If it gets the go-ahead, the new building at Polden Bower is likely to take around a year to construct. Somerset Council will work with its contractors to make sure there is little or no disruption to the education of pupils currently on roll.

The satellite at Somerset Bridge Primary School, however, will open in the current academic year. If the proposal is accepted, it will become a permanent arrangement from September 2026.

### **Informal Consultation (April – May 2026)**

An informal consultation was undertaken in April and May where immediate stakeholders (parents and carers of children on the school roll, and members of staff employed at the school) were asked whether or not they would support the proposal.

There were 24 responses. Somerset Council is very grateful to all who completed the questionnaire.

13 people said they supported the proposal to expand the main school site at Bower Lane; 4 said they did not support and 7 were undecided.

18 people said they supported the proposal to create a 'satellite' expansion at Somerset Bridge Primary School; 1 said they did not support and 5 were undecided.

### Parking and Traffic Concerns

While there was majority support for the proposals, some concerns were raised in relation to on-site parking capacity at Polden Bower School and traffic conditions on Bower Lane.

The Council acknowledges these concerns, and will ensure they are given full and proper consideration as part of the ongoing assessment of the proposal.

The proposal will now proceed to statutory consultation in order to seek further views prior to any decision being made.

### **Formal Consultation (June – July 2026)**

With this document, we are now launching a formal consultation where any members of the public can have their say. Parents, carers and members of staff remain very welcome to contribute to this consultation as well.

### **What feedback is being requested in the consultation?**

Somerset Council wants to know whether members of the public would support the proposals, and whether they have any feedback they would wish to be considered.

### **Can I object to the proposals?**

Yes, you can object or comment on the proposal.

### **What if I require additional information before providing my feedback?**

Please contact Somerset Council if you require any additional information before submitting your feedback. Our e-mail is [educationplaces@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:educationplaces@somerset.gov.uk)

An officer will endeavour to respond promptly to any questions received.

### **How long does the consultation run?**

The consultation period is from Monday 08 June 2026 to Friday 10 July 2026.

### **When is the deadline for submitting views?**

The deadline is 5.00pm on Friday 10 July 2026.

Please note that any views received after this time may not be able to be taken into account although there will be a public consultation later in the year. Parents, carers and members of staff will be welcome to contribute to the next consultation as well as this one.

### **How can I provide my views?**

Please submit your views at the following website:

<https://somersetcouncil.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/proposed-change-to-polden-bower-school-2026-27>

### **Will you respond to my feedback?**

Individual queries received during the consultation period will receive an acknowledgment although will not normally receive a response.

### **What will happen to my feedback?**

Somerset Council will consider all feedback received, and share it with the school.

The feedback will be used to help inform a decision that will be taken in late July.

*Thank you for considering our proposals, and we look forward to hearing your views.*