

News release

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FOUNDATIONS LAID FOR NEW SUNDERLAND SCHOOLS - PREFERRED BIDDER UNVEILED -

SUNDERLAND City Council has named Balfour Beatty Construction the preferred bidder to rebuild and refurbish six schools as part of the city's flagship Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme.

The £120 million initiative, which will transform the face of education in Sunderland by creating 21st century buildings and a cutting-edge ICT infrastructure, will see the launch of a new partnership between the council, key stakeholders and Balfour Beatty Construction.

Following months of detailed financial and technical scrutiny, Balfour Beatty Construction has been selected to undertake the £100 million design and build of the first phase of the BSF project; the largest single capital investment Sunderland's education system has seen.

Sunderland's BSF stakeholders, including academy lead sponsors and school governors, teachers and pupils, played an important role in the selection process and will continue to be consulted as the designs are finalised over the coming weeks.

Leader of Sunderland City Council, Councillor Bob Symonds, said: "We are thrilled to have reached this crucial landmark and cannot wait to see the final designs of these pioneering schools and academies. The bids received were of very high quality but Balfour Beatty Construction really stood out from the crowd as its designs not only looked iconic but addressed, head on, our educational vision and commitment to sustainability. From here, there will be a big emphasis on getting parents and pupils involved in developing the plans for the new facilities, making them a central part of local communities."

Balfour Beatty Construction, the new-build and refurbishment business of Balfour Beatty plc has a turnover of around £600 million and is one of the most respected construction companies in the UK. Its priorities are to build safely, to build environmental awareness, to build trust and to build long-term relationships with its customers.

Balfour Beatty Construction Framework Director for BSF, Barry Eaton, said: "We are very happy to be working with Sunderland City Council and its academy sponsors to deliver their combined vision to create a first-class learning environment. We seek to benefit the community in which we operate, not only through our work but also engaging positively and helping deliver additional social benefits."

Closing in August 2008, Pennywell Secondary School and Quarry View Primary School will operate as one all-age academy from existing buildings for 12 months. During this time, the new Gentoo Group-sponsored academy will be built on the Pennywell site and will open its doors in September 2009.

Castle View Secondary School and Hylton Red House School will close one year later, in August 2009, to re-open as two separate academies in September 2009 sponsored by Northumbrian Water and Leighton Group respectively; both will be largely new build with some refurbishment.

Washington Secondary School will be completely rebuilt and Biddick School Sports College and St Robert of Newminster RC Secondary School are both set to be refurbished by September 2009, while Sandhill View Secondary School will receive an ICT revamp.

Gentoo Group Chief Executive, Peter Walls, said: "This is a tremendous opportunity for the local community in and around Pennywell particularly for its future generations. It is now full steam ahead to open the academy in September 2008 and the new building in 2009."

John Cuthbert, Managing Director of Northumbrian Water, commented: "Northumbrian Water is delighted to reach this milestone in the progress to build the new academy at Castle View. We can now move on to build an exciting academy for current and future students in Sunderland. It will challenge them to succeed, but also allow them to fulfil their potential and build a sense of pride in all of the community."

Paul Callaghan, Chairman of the Leighton Group, added: "We are very pleased to have reached this stage in the process and it has been the result of a real partnership effort with ourselves and the other sponsors working closely with Sunderland City Council. I am looking forward to agreeing the final details of the construction of the new academy and seeing the final designs."

Tim Byles, Chief Executive of Partnerships for Schools (PfS), congratulated Sunderland on reaching this important decision, and said: "I look forward to seeing the new school buildings and innovative facilities that will arise from this partnership. They will bring huge benefits for the school children of Sunderland, both now and for years to come, and will make a great contribution to the overall success of the national BSF programme, which is improving learning environments in thousands of schools across England."

Once the contracts are finalised in March 2008, building work will begin. The first buildings will welcome pupils and staff in September 2009 and the last schools of the project will be completed in December 2009.

For further information on Sunderland's BSF programme visit www.sunderland-bsf.org.uk.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

PfS works with local authorities and the private sector to deliver the Government's secondary school renewal programme, BSF. The largest single schools capital investment programme for over 50 years, the remit of BSF is to rebuild or renew every one of England's 3,500 state secondary schools during its lifetime.

Sunderland is taking an innovative approach to BSF. Linking closely with other major initiatives, Sunderland plans to build three new 'Sunderland Model' academies as part of its wider BSF programme. Key principles of the Sunderland Model include:

- Admissions policies will be the same as for schools maintained by the council - there will be no selection
- Academies will be fully accessible to pupils with special educational needs and will support policies for increased inclusion in all mainstream schools
- All secondary schools, including academies, will work together on exclusion policies and practice to maintain the low levels of exclusion we have in Sunderland
- Academies will be a key part of the council's strategy for 14 to 19 learning, as set out in the 14 to 19 strategy for the city, 'Building a Better Future'
- Academies will work in collaboration and partnership with the council, other schools and the City of Sunderland College

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