

Balerno High School

Balerno High School opened in 1984 and has a current operating capacity of 850-900 students.

In 2018 City of Edinburgh Council proposed Balerno High School be rebuilt, on its existing site, with a capacity of 1200 pupils [1]. That proposal was however replaced in 2022 with proposals for refurbishment.

While Balerno High School has been refurbished to last longer, some might consider it likely that the high cost of maintenance coupled with growing demand for spaces make it likely that a rebuild will have to be reconsidered in the not-too-distant future. The question then, is when?

Taking into account that Balerno High School was re-roofed in 2021/22, with a twenty-year guarantee covering that work, it may be unlikely that CEC will actively want to be considering rebuilding on the basis of dilapidation until 2040, if then. The received wisdom is however that, after 40 years, school buildings begin rapid deterioration, and after 60 years most schools are abandoned. By 2040 Balerno High School will be 60 years old, and so it is fair to assume that moves to consider replacement will probably have to start in the mid 2030's.

Moves to consider replacement may have to start earlier however on capacity grounds. Recent capacity reviews apparently suggest that Balerno High School is facing sustained pressure on capacity, with significant enrolment continuing into 2026. While the 2018 proposal suggested expanding the school's capacity to 1200, the school has historically continued to operate around its 850-pupil capacity. That capacity will, however, be exhausted during the mid-2030's.

Dean Park Primary School, the main feeder primary for BHS, has a current capacity of 546 spread over 19 classes. Student projections suggest that its 546 capacity will be inadequate by 2028 with projections indicating numbers of 548 in 2028 to 678 in 2034 [2].

Balerno High School roll projection is 892 for 2026 against a planned capacity of 924, with a roll projection of 900 in 2034; so far so good. Further projections will of course depend on population expansion statistics, but it would seem unlikely that High School capacity of 850 will be sufficient after 2035 or thereabouts.

A Local Place Plan will accordingly, in my view at least, have to consider and if so advised, make proposals on a new Balerno High School, including location.

Balerno High School responses from the recent Local Place Plan Questionnaire highlighted the following points:

1. Strong demand for Rebuild or Major Refurbishment

- The most dominant view: the school is **outdated, worn out, and “falling apart.”** Many responses explicitly call for a **full rebuild**, often referencing newer local schools as the benchmark. Others would accept a **deep refurbishment**, but not minor fixes.

2. Poor condition of facilities

- Repeated concerns were made about: **aging classrooms (cold, single glazing, leaks)**. Also noted were **toilets and changing rooms in poor condition** and **old furniture with uncomfortable seating**. **Sports facilities (especially pool and changing areas)** were seen as substandard.

3. Comparison gap with other schools

- There is a strong perception that Balerno is being **“left behind”** compared to nearby newer schools. This is affecting **Student morale** and Sense of fairness/equality.

4. Traffic, transport, and safety issues

- Major concerns were noted about **School buses blocking main road (Bridge Road)** with **Dangerous congestion** at pick-up/drop-off places. Additional issues particularly include **Illegal parking** (zigzag areas and disabled bays); a **Lack of safe crossings**. A **Poor Active Travel** infrastructure was noted.

5. Desire for better sports and community facilities

- Requests included: **New/updated swimming pool** and **Gym** which should also be open to the public. **Criticism** was made about **management by Edinburgh Leisure**. **Comment** was received about the need for **more diverse sports** (not just rugby or football).

6. Community access and use

- A strong desire was expressed that the school should become a **Community Hub**. Many want Facilities open after hours for: **Fitness classes, Adult sports** and Events. Frustration was expressed about **limited or reduced access (e.g. pool closure)**.

7. Accessibility and inclusion

- There is a **Need** for: **Better disabled access (especially changing rooms)** and **Specialist provision (e.g., ASN/autism support)**.

8. Environmental and sustainability concerns

- Suggestions include: **Energy efficiency upgrades** (windows, heating), and **Renewable energy use**.

9. General maintenance and upkeep

- Even without a rebuild: there is a need for **Better, stronger maintenance culture**, to include **cleaning, repairs, and preventative maintenance**. There is a **feeling** that the school has been **neglected over time**.

Suggested Proposals

1. Strategic Option: New Build vs Major Refurbishment

- Conduct a **feasibility study** comparing:
 - Full rebuild (preferred by majority)
 - Deep retrofit/modernisation
 - **Ensure outcome delivers:**
 - Modern learning environments
 - Long-term cost efficiency
 - Parity with nearby schools
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2. Transform into a “Community Hub School”

- Design or retrofit to include:
 - Public-access **gym + fitness suite**
 - Upgraded **swimming pool**
 - Multi-use sports halls
 - Operate with: **Evening/weekend access**
 - Community programming (classes, clubs)
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3. Transport & Safety Redesign

- Create a **dedicated off-road bus hub** (key priority)
 - Introduce:
 - **Safer drop-off zones**
 - **Enforced parking controls**
 - **Pedestrian crossings / lights**
 - Expand:
 - Walking & cycling infrastructure
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4. Facilities Upgrade Package

Whether rebuild or refurb:

- Modern classrooms (warm, ventilated, flexible)
- New furniture (ergonomic seating)

- **Upgraded:**
 - Toilets
 - Changing rooms (inclusive + accessible)
 - Science labs & tech spaces
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5. Sports & Wellbeing Investment

- **New or upgraded:**
 - Swimming pool
 - Gym (dual school/community use)
 - Multi-sport facilities beyond rugby/football
 - **Add:** Outdoor learning spaces
 - Wellbeing/mental health areas
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6. Accessibility & Inclusion Improvements

- Fully accessible campus design
 - Dedicated **ASN/specialist support facilities**
 - Inclusive changing and learning environments
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7. Sustainability Plan

- Replace single glazing with efficient systems
 - Introduce:
 - Renewable heating (e.g., heat pumps)
 - Energy-efficient lighting
 - Embed sustainability into learning spaces
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8. Maintenance & Management Reform

- Implement:
 - **Planned preventative maintenance programme**
 - Regular condition audits
- Improve:
 - **Responsiveness to infrastructure issues**

9. Capacity & Future-Proofing

- Ensure school is:
 - Large enough for future population growth
 - Flexible for evolving curriculum (vocational + digital + practical skills)

Bottom Line

➔ The community expects either a **new school** or a **transformational overhaul**, combined with safer transport and stronger community integration.