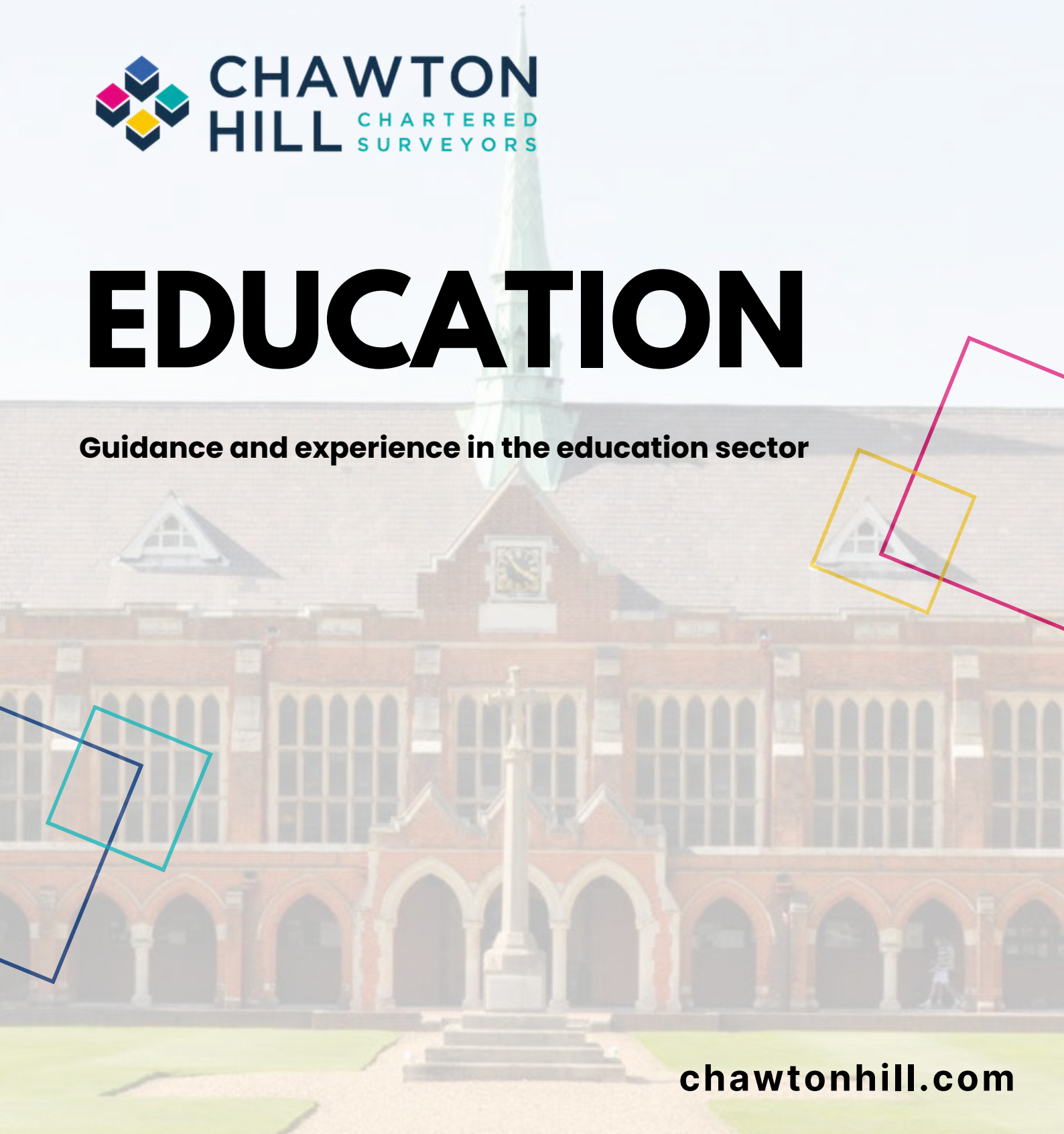
CHAWTON HILL CHARTERED SURVEYORS

EDUCATION

Guidance and experience in the education sector



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CHAWTON HILL

Thank you for your interest in Chawton Hill today. We're an enthusiastic and dedicated team of RICS Chartered Surveyors, construction consultants and project managers. Our RICS Chartered Surveyors and project managers deliver an exceptional construction and surveying support. From school development to sports grounds, energy to general maintenance we have a solution to support you.

This brief guide provides some insight and help into how we assist people in the education sector and some examples of past work. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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ABOUT
CHAWTON HILL

Chawton Hill have been helping education organisations in & around the South East since the very start of the practice, over twenty years ago. Our experience extends to Independent Schools, Foundation Schools and Academies.

We are active participants at the Independent School's Bursars Association conference and work closely with many educational establishments.

Whatever your need in the education sector, our team will be able to support you from beginning to end, ensuring your project is delivered successfully and within budget.

Your Education project will undoubtedly be something carried out after serious thought and careful consideration. It is therefore vital that you get the best professional advice possible to ensure success.

Supporting your college or school in bidding for funding is a specialism – success in bidding for funding will ensure you can implement the projects your students need.

Providing exceptional education facilities for schools and colleges is a core area of our business and stretches back to our incorporation. For us, it is one of the keystones of our business and we are proud to have worked at so many establishments and varied school types.

You can be confident working with Chawton Hill that we have experience working with independent schools, foundation schools and academies. Client commissions range from minor alteration works and building condition surveys for CIF bids, to the design and project management of new buildings and sensitively detailed extensions to schools.

Key Experience and Services:

Sports facilities, Arts facilities, Accessiblity features, Funding submissions, Window replacement and planned maintenance, Accommodation, Renewable energy installations, Reinstatement cost assessments, project and cost management, employers agent, design and specification, and much more...

Project Highlight

ETON COLLEGE

Eton, one of the country's oldest and best known public schools was opened in 1440 by King Henry VI. Henry wanted his subjects to have the opportunities of gaining knowledge that he had enjoyed, and he made provision for 70 poor boys, known as King's Scholars, to be housed and educated at Eton free of charge. Alongside them, other boys could also benefit from the free education, but they would have to pay for their accommodation.

Chawton Hill were appointed as Principal Designer, and Contract Administrator on this project for Eton College to refurbish a large number of ageing windows on two accommodation blocks and staff accomodation.

The original windows were installed by the well-known supplier, Crittall, so we worked with them and contractor, Cravencroft, to maintain the fenestration style and design of the original buildings. The new windows are double glazed, as opposed to the original single-glazed units. This means that the school can benefit from improved energy efficiency while retaining the original period design and look of the buildings.

This project saw the replacement of a number of windows - retaining original design style whilst significantly improving energy efficiency.

Project Highlight

ST ANDREW'S SCHOOL

St Andrew's School was founded in 1937 and is an established, respected and thriving co-educational prep school of around 300 children from the ages of 3 to 13.

The school is set in 11 acres of grounds within a quiet residential area approximately half a mile from Woking town centre in Surrey. St Andrew's is very proud of its excellent facilities and of the beautiful natural environment in which the school is located.

Chawton Hill project managed extensive works at the school which included remodelling the school reception, building a new auditorium, extending the dining facilities and adding a food technology room.

As part of the project, we linked these buildings together to create a free-flowing facility.

Devising an efficient project plan was critical to delivering the development within a live school environment. This included quiet working periods and prohibiting construction deliveries during school drop off/collection times.

Limited site access required the removal of around 15 non-indigenous trees which were replaced with more appropriate local species and a range of measures to improve bio diversity.

This project to provide a remodelled reception and the provision of extensive new facilities required careful planning to minimise disruption to school life.

Project Highlight

ST TERESA'S EFFINGHAM

With over 640 pupils, St. Teresa's is the largest Catholic independent girls' school in the country. The school offers an inclusive environment welcoming students from a range of backgrounds, open to students of all faiths and none.

Core values of faith, character, community, compassion and intellect knit the school together, resulting in an atmosphere of mutual support, vibrancy and kindness.

The Performing Arts Centre, provides state of the art facilities for the expanding and successful music and drama departments at St Teresa's School, Effingham, Surrey.

The Centre provides music rooms, recording suites, music practice, drama studios and a stage lighting and sound effects system.

The building has been designed with a lower ground floor set into the slope of the site. This space is ideally suited for drama and provides access directly to the rear of the stage area for performances and practice sessions.

The Centre has become the focal point for school and community productions throughout the year and provides seating for 750.

The £2.5m project was completed in 52 weeks by R Durtnell and Sons Ltd with Miller Bourne as the novated Architect and Chawton Hill as the employers agent, project manager & principal designer.

The Performing Arts Centre at St Teresas provides a dynamic and flexible space for both school and community productions.

Project Highlight

CHARTERHOUSE

Founded in 1611, Charterhouse is one of the UK's leading independent boarding and day schools, providing an outstanding education for boys and girls aged 13 to 18.

We worked with the Charterhouse School to produce a Feasibility Study to assess the costs to improve disabled access and toilet facilities to the Ben Travers Theatre.

Built in 1980, the Theatre was in need of some modernisation. We worked with Charterhouse school to complete the works and in particular, improve the way some of the space was being used.

Following a Feasibility Study it was agreed to proceed with works to improve disabled access and the associated toilet facilities to the Ben Travers Theatre at Charterhouse.

As part of the access scheme, an improved entrance, together with a new Theatre Director's office, was constructed utilising the existing space within the original foyer.

Other works included new lighting and decoration, carpeting a new disabled WC and alteration of the kitchen and bar area.

A new theatre directors office, new lighting, carpeting and new toilet formed part of this scheme to improve accessibility

Project Highlight

ST JOSEPH'S, GUILDFORD

This project not only provided a new sports area for the school which can be used all year round, but with the addition of new floodlights and other features, it can now be let out as a facility for the community.

We were initially able to help the school team with a feasibility study. We then took on the role of principal designer, contract administrator and project manager

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Guildford already had an existing multi-use games area. This was an old AstroTurf pitch which had come to the end of its life. It needed replacing to improve safety and provide a better facility for the students.

Enabling its use outside teaching hours provides an alternative and helpful revenue source for the school.

The needle-punched artificial grass, Matchplay 2, was provided by leading surface specialist Playrite. The Philips OptiVision LED gen 3.5 floodlighting system was installed by their approved partner Powercor, and H A Marks were the main contractor on the scheme.

The project was completed within budget and was delivered over the school's summer holiday, just in time for the new school year. Thanks to all involved in delivering a great project for St Josephs.

The project not only provides a new sports area for the school, it can now be let out as a facility for the community.

Project Highlight

ALDRO SCHOOL

Aldro is a day and boarding school for approximately 180 children aged between 7 and 13.

The Limes and Clockhouse buildings are two Grade II listed dwellings dating back, in part, to 1743. They are set within the grounds of the Aldro school in Shackleford, Surrey.

The Cottages are situated within the curtilage of Aldro. Both the Limes and Clockhouse cottages are in the Shackleford Conservation Area and are Grade II listed. These properties were originally a stable block and coach house to the main house, which later became Aldro.

Following the appointment of a new Headteacher, it was decided that the Limes and Clockhouse buildings should be converted to a single dwelling to provide accommodation for the Headteacher and his family.

The finished Grade II listed conversion met the aspirations of the school, whilst complying with building regs and planning consent.

Chawton Hill were commissioned to provide design, contract administration and project management services for the refurbishment and internal layout alterations from inception through to completion.

Chawton Hill worked closely with the local authority Conservation Officer to ensure that the finished development did not detract from the significance of the original listed buildings.

Amongst other works, the project included the creation of a new opening between the Clockhouse and Limes Cottages. Additionally, removal of the bathroom in Limes Cottage and construction of a new bathroom within Clockhouse Cottage.

It also included the construction of a new wall to create a Public Function Space at ground floor in Limes cottage

The finished Grade II Listed conversion project was successfully completed whilst meeting the aspirations of the school and within the latest building regulations and listed building consent.

Project Highlight

MOOR LANE RESPITE CENTRE

Though not involved in the early stages of the project, Chawton Hill supported stakeholders and client to bring it to completion.

In the original works, precise user requirements at Moor Lane weren't captured. Chawton Hill worked with the end user and stakeholders, to deliver a solution that met the requirements of all involved. We spent time with stakeholders to redefine the project brief, ensuring that the finished project would meet their needs.

The result is a useful and vibrant, purpose-built overnight respite facility in Chessington. The building will provide short break care for children and young people who may have multiple disabilities. Often they will also have complex medical needs and challenging behaviour.

The centre provides a vital link in the support of families with additional care needs. In addition to respite care, it hosts summer holiday clubs. The centre provides a range of activities for children with special educational and care needs.

We were pleased to engage in some great collaboration between our clients, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, the end-user – Achieving for Children, and Cravencroft – the project contractors.

Particular detail we brought to the project included external turfing works, fencing and playground detail. We also added external ramps for wheelchairs and some minor alterations internally.

Project Highlight

NESCOT COLLEGE

We were delighted to work again with our friends at Nescot College Surrey. We have been helping them prepare an application bid to fund a new Animal Care Unit (ACU).

Chawton Hill have an extensive history with Nescot. Projects we've supported have included the development of an integrated learning hub for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) students. We also supported the later construction of an extra annexe at the college.

New Project

Most recently, we have been working with Nescot to prepare a bid for the expansion of their existing animal care unit (ACU). As part of our initial project management support for this scheme, we have assisted in several elements. These included preparing budget cost estimates, cash flow forecasts, project programme, and provisional design and layout of the site.

If funding is successful, we look forward to supporting the team at Nescot in the administration and management of their next project.

All land-based courses at Nescot take place in purpose-built facilities around the main campus building. Including the Animal Care Centre, more than half of the College's space is dedicated to supporting student studies. The college is home to a range of exotic, agricultural and domestic animals.

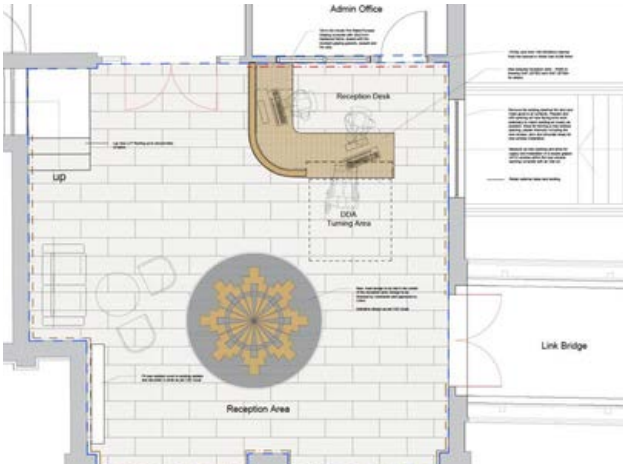
New Unit

The intention is for a further modular unit to be built to accommodate more students. It will also allow a wider range of vocational courses in animal husbandry.

The proposal includes two large classrooms, office space, cleaning facilities and a nocturnal animal room. We wish the team at Nescot every success and we look forward to working with them on the next stage of their project.

Project Highlight

SHREWSBURY HOUSE SCHOOL



Every single project in the built environment comes with its own challenges. Schools in particular, require careful thought. We often have to plan work and activities around many competing needs, usually ensuring that disruption to the school's working day is kept to a minimum.

Shrewsbury House School in Surbiton was founded in 1865 by a local clergyman. It moved in 1910 to 'Haulkerton' a large Victorian Arts and Crafts mansion that dated from the mid-nineteenth century. It was a privilege to work with such a prestigious client to bring their reception into the 21st Century.

The school had a desire to refresh their reception area, to make it more appealing to visitors and generally refresh the area.

The challenge was to meet this brief, whilst at the same time keeping within the client's budget and ensure a good quality result.

There were also a number of other considerations, such as the requirements of the Equality Act, visitor circulation, etc.

One key feature of the project was the reception desk. The client already had a standard desk, but wanted something more appealing. Using our knowledge of suppliers and sources, we were able to arrange for a desk to be custom-made. This provides the room with a classy appearance, whilst maintaining all of the client and regulatory requirements.

Project Highlight

PETER SYMONDS COLLEGE

Peter Symonds College in Winchester instructed us to assist with CIF Bid pricing on two CIF Bids. The first was for Roof Repair and Replacement works. The second was Replacement of a Conservatory building.

Chawton Hill specified, tendered and managed both projects to completion and below we review the work carried out and show the dramatic improvements to the Adult & Higher Education Division facilities.

To recap on the Roof Repair and Replacement works first. At the time, we summarized the project as follows:

“The flat roofs and elements of the pitched roofs have been subject to failure with many patch repairs, which have also failed in some locations.”

-Extract from CIF Funding Application

100% of the flat roofs needed stripping back to the deck layer and modern insulation added to improve thermal performance. A new felt system was built up to provide a 25-year guarantee. All roof lights were also replaced. The pitched roofs received new felt, battens and tiles whilst the dormers received new windows and uPVC cladding. Overall around two-thirds of the roofing was replaced, whilst around one-third was repaired.

The second project was to replace a conservatory building. Our report prior to commencing the works stated:

“The conservatory building has been subject to roof failure and many patch repairs, which have also failed in some locations. Surveys of the roof have identified it is life expired with water ingress causing damage to internal finishes, fixtures and electrical services in a number of areas.”

-Extract from CIF Funding Application

The building had become unusable for extended periods, being either too hot or too cold. This was in part due to the use of inefficient roof and wall materials. The new building has an insulated tiled roof and insulated cavity walls along with double glazing.

5 TIPS FOR EDUCATION FACILITIES

We are often asked what makes our approach to delivering education facilities so successful? We know from HEAD research by Professor Peter Barrett that great school design helps improve classroom learning by up to 16%. This is something we discussed in this recent post.

However, how do we at Chawton Hill deliver exceptional education facilities?

1. Project Planning

We place paramount importance on getting things right from the start of every commission. This means every project, no matter how big or small must have a project delivery plan. This will ensure our clients know what it is we will be doing for them and when. Our ISO 9001:2015 certification means that we follow set and approved procedures to enhance our service delivery. We aim to ensure all schemes are completed in the most effective and consistent way possible.

2. Accountability

As members of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors we have professional standards of conduct to follow to ensure we avoid conflicts of interest and always provide sound, impartial advice. We are particularly keen to review carefully each project. Did it deliver? Were there areas that could have been improved? Are students and teachers happy with the outcome?
It is by applying this collective knowledge built up over years and hundreds of school design projects, that we are able to offer a specialist solution that minimises risks and maximises value.

3. Procurement of project work

We always tender building projects to a range of contractors to ensure best value for money. The process ensures we have a credible range of figures for discussion. Contractors are selected for their ability to produce good quality work. They must show sound experience of working within the education sector, and understanding of schools' expectations around project delivery. Issues such as access constraints and working sensitively around occupied school accommodation are key.

4. Value

You will of course be looking for exceptional value for money. Chawton Hill can provide a range of commercial solutions, including lump sum fee quotations or percentage fees, based on contract values. Our hourly rates reflect our competitive position in the market place and we are flexible in meeting particular requirements of the client.

A school design that is full of natural light, has good air quality, good acoustics, comfortable temperature control and enough space to allow for a range of activities will have a positive outcome on students' results.

However policy can often emphasise quantitative evidence over qualitative. So it was good to find a piece of research conducted by Professor Peter Barrett entitled, Holistic Evidence and Design. Prof. Barrett has put a figure on how the physical characteristics of a classroom impacts the learning progress of pupils.

That figure is 16%. Students in well designed rooms will perform 16% better than those who do not.

There are, of course, many factors that contribute to raising educational attainment in schools, including great teaching. However, this research demonstrates that good learning environments enable both staff and students to give their best.

The independent school sector realises that to differentiate your offering and compete against other fee paying facilities they have to invest in quality. The quality of school design must go beyond baseline specifications.

This is where experience and shared knowledge plays a vital role. The ability to agree an effective brief, maximise value and deliver a solution that all key stakeholders are proud of is what we at Chawton Hill do best.

5. Working Together

We understand the pressures schools are under to be distinctive and maximise scarce resources. Chawton Hill approach projects with an ethos of adaptability, knowing the final outcome is always a development of the initial plan. We work hard to involve all clients in the process, something that our ISO 9001:2015 certification has a measurable effect on. We are particularly keen to review carefully each project – Did it deliver? Were there areas that could have been improved? Are students and teachers happy with the outcome?

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SCHOOL DESIGN IMPROVES LEARNING

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PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

With all building projects, consultation with local residents, end users and key stakeholders so they can provide their views and feedback on a proposal, is always a central part in refining the final project.

We've carried out numerous events, whether to gather feedback from local residents on a school extension or end users' thoughts on a multi-million pound New Build.

In each case we aim to follow a set of key principles;

Clear and Concise – e.g. the use of plain English and avoiding acronyms. Being clear what questions we need to ask and avoiding lengthy documents.

Consultations Purpose – what feedback are we looking to gather.

Consultation Information – provide enough information to ensure that those consulted understand the issues and can give informed responses.

Proportionate Consultation – too long will unnecessarily delay a project whilst consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses.

Targeted Consultation – e.g. who is affected by the project? Who may have an influence on the final decision? Who knows about the subject matter? Who has an interest in the project?

Approved before publication – collective agreement before publishing a written consultation, how the feedback has informed the project and how many responses have been received.

RAAC ROOF PLANK FAILURES

Our client commissions range from minor alteration works, and building condition surveys for CIF bids through to the design and project management of new buildings and sensitively detailed extensions to schools.

SCOSS warned of the problem in the Twelfth Report of SCOSS in 1999. Since then, there will have been deterioration, possibly effects from maintenance or refurbishment, or a change in environment, all of which can adversely affect long-term performance.
-Standing Committee on Structural Safety, Alert | May 2019

Warning Signs

If you own or manage a building with a flat roof from the 1980's or earlier, perhaps you have noticed one of the following warning signs:

- The roof has been resurfaced since its original construction. This is particularly an issue if the load has been increased.
- There is significant ponding on the roof.
- The roof is leaking or has leaked in the past.

RAAC or Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete roof planks, were widely used in flat roof construction between the 1960's to 1980's.

Unfortunately, the methods employed to construct some of these planks resulted in a relatively weak structure. One with a low capacity for developing a bond with embedded reinforcement. Recent roof failures have identified rusting of this embedded reinforcement and cracking of the planks. Whilst not definitive, this cracking is believed to be associated with moisture and temperature-related movements in the planks.

Many of the earlier RAAC roof planks have been replaced or had spans shortened by the introduction of secondary supports. However, buildings constructed with RAAC planks in the 1980s are past their estimated 30-year life and pose a serious risk. In May 2019 the Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) issued a formal alert:

Sight must not be lost of the fact that recent collapses have been sudden with very little noticeable warning. This is indicative of shear failure in cementitious materials and can only be protected against by knowing
that there is sufficient shear resistance in the material, the reinforcement, or both.
-Standing Committee on Structural Safety, Alert | May 2019

If there is any suspicion that RAAC planks are present in a building's roof, SCOSS recommends the appointment of an appropriately experienced Chartered Building Surveyor.

An NHS Foundation Trust did just that. We have recently surveyed a number of NHS Foundation Trust sites to establish if there is a potential for RAAC planks to be present.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR RAAC IN SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, HOSPITALS AND MORE?

Few people could have missed the news in late 2023 when RAAC hit the headlines, but what is the current situation? And what is being done to the buildings that are affected?

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) is a lightweight 'bubbly' (ie 'aerated') form of concrete. It was mainly used in flat roofs in the UK from the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s. Whilst it exists in buildings in both the public and private sectors, it is more prevalent in schools, hospitals and public buildings. RAAC was seen as a cheaper and easier alternative to standard concrete. However, it is less durable and, typically has a lifespan of around 30 years. There is a risk it can fail and lead to structural collapse. This has jolted the government into action to mitigate the dangers.

Schools

On 8 February 2024, the government confirmed plans to permanently remove RAAC from all schools and colleges in England.

It also advised that all work to remove RAAC will be funded through grants or the School Rebuilding Programme. There are over 22,000 schools and colleges in England. From those, 234 have confirmed RAAC so far. The DfE has indicated that 119 of these schools will need one or more buildings rebuilt or refurbished. There are 110 schools and colleges where work to remove RAAC will be less complex and extensive. A further 5 educational institutions have alternative arrangements in place.

Hospitals

The NHS in England put in place a rolling programme to identify RAAC in hospitals after the RAAC alert issued by The Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) in 2019. As of 17 October 2023, there are 42 hospital sites with confirmed RAAC in the programme. The Department of Health and Social Care states that the programme is backed with significant additional funding of £698 million from 2021 to 2025 for trusts to put in place necessary remediation and failsafe measures.

What you need to do if you suspect RAAC?

The first thing you need to do is arrange for a survey of the building to determine whether RAAC is present. At Chawton Hill, the team have been carrying out widespread surveys to identify RAAC. If RAAC is found, we can help find an engineer to come and assess its severity and identify the next steps. In the event it is deemed low risk, then it will just need monitoring.

What to do?

The key here is monitoring and management. RAAC roof planks did not suddenly all fail on 1st September, and in many cases, they may well be fine for years to come. But unless the risks are assessed, monitored and managed by a construction professional, you will never know. And the same is true for any building-related issue.

The first thing to do is to ensure your planned maintenance programme is up to date and has been prepared by a qualified RICS surveyor. A small investment in a survey now can help you prioritise issues by urgency and cost, and ensure minor issues don't turn into major ones in future.

Of course, paying for external advice can seem daunting, particularly if there's no immediate or obvious benefit. But that advice can help to ensure you save money and reduce risk, maybe even save lives, in the medium-to-long term.

A good surveyor will also be able to draw on a network of trusted suppliers and use industry knowledge to save you money on any maintenance costs. They will be able to help you prioritise work and help you secure funding for projects. At Chawton Hill, we've helped several colleges and schools find funding for their projects from various funds.

If it is more serious, then remedial action might be needed, and work may need to be carried out. Kit Lu has been particularly busy helping our clients with their concerns. We're always happy to help where we can.

Considerations and costs

The remedial works that need to be done will vary from building to building and depend on a variety of factors. These include building size, location, and use. This will then have an impact on how long the work will take and the cost. It is also important to consider the implications for the people who use the building. Whether it's residents in a house, patients in a hospital or students at a school.

If substantial structural work needs to be done – e.g. a whole new roof deck, then the building may be out of action. It can be difficult to arrange work around school times. We can help with scheduling, to identify the most efficient and least disruptive time to schedule any works.

There's also the added risk of encountering other harmful materials such as asbestos. Again, Chawton Hill have several trusted suppliers who we can draw. This will help minimise risk and ensure everything is done to ensure safety and legality when tackling such issues.

It's important to consider the legal implications too. The public sector has received a lot of attention but the prevalence of RAAC in the private sector should not be overlooked or underestimated. The Defective Premises Act 1972 imposes a duty of care on landlords and constructors. It would be advisable for a building owner or operator of a property built between 1950s and 1990s to organise a survey if they suspect RAAC could be present.

SOLAR POWER FOR SCHOOLS?

Recent news revealed that 2023 recorded a consistent temperature of 1.5 degrees above average. It seems now that there's no doubt that the climate crisis is here to stay. So is the key question now, how can we limit the potential risks?

One solution is renewable energy.

PV and Solar Options

There are many routes to achieving this, but one popular solution is solar or 'photovoltaic' (PV) energy. Chawton Hill has been working with Powercor on several projects. One of Powercor's specialisms is the installation of PV systems in schools.
There are many advantages to installing PV systems, from providing education opportunities to students, to energy savings or even feed-in tariff revenue from the national grid. But what are the potential costs, risks and key considerations when moving to solar power?
We caught up with Dave from Chawton Hill and Chris from Powercor to find out more...

- Chris: *What are the benefits of PV systems and how easy are they to maintain?*

A big bonus of course is de-carbonisation. Depending on the size of the array (the number and scale of panels fitted) you can often have a surplus of energy for your building. This in turn means you can potentially sell surplus energy to other users or the grid, making it not just a green energy source, but a revenue source too.

- Dave: What are the costs of installing panels, and how long does it take to recoup that cost?

With a return on investment of just three years in many cases, the cost can be recouped far more quickly than most other decarbonisation investments.

Certain bodies can also apply for financial support or in some cases funding for energy efficient projects. This means that the capital investment cost can be relatively low.

- Chris: Are PV panels truly sustainable? Can you measure the long-term (embodied) carbon cost including the mining of materials to make them, etc?

The carbon trail is a concern, and with it still being early days, things are evolving all the time. Panels generally start life in China, although some come from the US. However, panels generally have a life expectancy of 25 years at least, so it will be some time before life-expired panels are a major concern.
There are already regulations in place for the disposal and recovery of materials in end-of-life panels and we've no doubt that over time, the ability to re-use and recycle materials will improve.

- Dave: What's your role in the process? How does Chawton Hill add value to the installation of PV panels?

Chawton Hill can help in several ways across the process of panel installation. This starts with feasibility studies and assisting with planning regulations. We also bring access to our wide network of specialist engineers, designers and experts who can help ensure the installation is completed on time, on budget and in compliance with the law. One thing you don't want is to find that you've installed the panels but haven't complied with planning regulations or requirements of your local authority.

- Chris: Given the British weather, and the fact that during the 'sunniest' period of the year, schools are closed, can solar energy really be cost-effective?

This is the classic question that comes up regularly. Yes, a lot of schools are shut in the summer, but many do now use their spaces in the summer – summer clubs, staffing activities etc. There may still be a surplus, but we can use that for other things.
St Georges in Weybridge is a good example of a school where the team added £1 million of solar equipment, but now finds ways to use the energy when there's a surplus – car charging, cooling, etc. and as mentioned there's a possibility to earn money by feeding energy back to the grid. Sleeving is one option, where you can sell energy to other partners.
There are many options to ensure the PV panels are still working even if your staff are on holiday. And In fact, though many people associate PV with bright sunshine, they can be very effective in standard daylight. One client had one of their most efficient months in February 2023.

- Dave: From experience what do you find the hardest to manage on school projects – how can clients help make the project as successful as possible?

Some of the biggest challenges tend to be around listed buildings.

The risks and challenges here are particularly interesting. Council/conservation officers can then need involvement and things become potentially more complicated and protracted. We've had good levels of success by keeping on top of the latest changes in regulation and ensuring we communicate well with all the parties involved.

Live schools are often a challenge for any construction project and solar panels are no exception. If work is planned for areas that are in use, then the key is trying to ensure we don't interfere with day to day school activities. We also need to deal carefully with logistics of deliveries.

Regulation

Chris also mentions several rules and regulations coming into play, which qualified advisors can assist with. In particular, insurers and the Fire Protection Association have issued RC 62 to tackle the risk of fire associated with panels. These and other considerations need to be taken into account on any PV project.

He talks about the importance of ensuring your systems are working efficiently once installed. The team use a product called "Simble". This connects a range of 'Internet of Things' devices, to provide a one-stop overview of energy performance. The aim is to ensure systems run as efficiently as possible, identifying the benefits of installing PV and other equipment such as low-energy lighting.

Ultimately both feel the opportunities for reducing energy usage, feeding energy into the grid and benefitting from solar power are set to expand in the years ahead.

SHOULD YOU CONSIDER REINSTATEMENT COST ASSESSMENTS?

Reinstatement Cost Assessments (RCS) may be a requirement of an insurer. Often, they take place as a matter of routine and good practice. This is a service Chawton Hill have been offering to clients for many years. We carry them out for schools, commercial properties, and other types of building across the South-East of England.

What are they?

The clue is in the title. In the event of a total loss of a building or property due to fire or some other insured peril, an accurate valuation will be needed. This is to ensure the property is not under-insured. Or indeed, to ensure you are not over-insuring the property unnecessarily.

A surveyor will use a number of techniques to identify a reasonable sum to reinstate the property in the event of a catastrophic loss. Following a visit to site, the surveyor will identify the potential cost of clearing, organising design, professional services and re-constructing the building.

A Reinstatement Cost Assessment is unlike a market or property valuation. It will identify all the costs in rebuilding a property if it is completely destroyed, or damaged beyond economic repair.

These surveys are crucial for any property, whether in the education sector, healthcare, residential or commercial. Insurers will want an accurate assessment of the property value.

Frequency

The RICS recommend having a survey completed regularly to ensure any changes in value are taken into account. There are many factors that can affect the cost to reinstate a building. Some examples include:

- Labour costs. Recent years have seen significant increases in labour costs, as skilled labour has either left the country or re-trained into different areas.
- Material costs. Again, recent years have seen major increases in the costs of materials such as timber and steel. The latter having almost doubled in price over a twelve-month period.
- Changes in the local environment. Any number of alterations to the area in which the property sits may affect the cost to reinstate.
- Changes to the property itself. It may sound obvious, but if a significant extension or refurbishment of a property takes place, that will change the value. All too often, people forget the effects of such changes.

There is no specific timescale for re-surveying a property. The RICS, and insurers, Allianz suggest that yearly may be too frequent. However, we recommend around every three years or at the point any significant change takes place on the property. In any case, an index-linked increase is prudent to take into account any regular increases in cost, etc.

Ultimately, carrying out a reinstatement survey is something you need to take a judgement call on, but it could help you avoid losing out in the event of disaster.

COMMON BUILDING ISSUES IN SCHOOLS & HOW EARLY INTERVENTIONS HELP PREVENT THEM

School buildings are busy places. From classrooms and halls to kitchens and sports facilities, they are in constant use. Many schools are also working with older buildings that were built decades ago. As with many older buildings, design or material often only become apparent over time.

While some building issues are expected with age. Many of the most common and costly problems in schools can be reduced or avoided entirely with early surveys and planned maintenance.

Common Building Issues in Schools

Roofs and Water

Leaking roofs are one of the most frequent problems in schools. Small issues such as slipped tiles, damaged roof flashings or blocked gutters can lead to internal leaks, water damage to ceilings, and disruption to lessons. Damp and mould can follow, creating unhealthy environments and increasing long-term repair costs.

Hidden Defects in Older Buildings

Many school buildings were constructed in the mid-20th century when different construction materials and methods were common. One example of this is reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, or RAAC, a lightweight material widely used in schools between the 1950s and 1990s. In 2024, 234 schools had been identified as having RAAC, of which 119 needed extensive work to remove it. In September 2025, the Government stated that 60% of these were either “fully free” of RAAC or “on the path to removal”.

At Chawton Hill we have had direct experience supporting clients where RAAC has been identified. At Camberly theatre, RAAC planks were discovered within the roof structure. We supported the client through the investigation and helped deliver a solution that allowed the theatre to reopen safely.

Heating, Ventilation and Temperature Control Issues

Older heating systems and poor ventilation often make classrooms too cold in winter and too hot in summer. Teachers have reported broken boilers, overheated classrooms and frozen conditions that impact learning. Issues with heating and ventilation are often closely linked to how energy efficient a building is. At Chawton Hill we work with schools to identify improvements that help classrooms stay warmer in winter and cooler in summer. This includes looking at how buildings perform day to day and advising on changes that are realistic for school budgets and buildings.

Wear and Tear in High-Use Areas

Everyday use has its effect on doors, windows, floors and external areas. If issues like rotten window frames, worn bricks or broken doors are not spotted early, they can affect safety and accessibility over time. We have supported a number of schools with window and rooflight replacement projects.

Examples where Chawton Hill have helped clients on these issues include St Luke's CofE Primary School in Kingston, where the rooflights were replaced from small to large to enhance natural sunlight. Also at Nescot college, where window replacements improved the overall thermal performance of the building.

Compliance and Safety Risks

Schools must meet current safety standards. Hidden hazards such as damaged fire doors, outdated electrical systems or poorly maintained access routes can pose risks if they are not identified early in a condition survey.

Current Examples from the UK

The condition of many school buildings in England has attracted national attention in recent years. National Audit Office (NAO) report estimates that 700,000 pupils learn in buildings needing major repairs, some with critical safety risks like asbestos or Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). Leading to learning being disrupted, despite government funding for rebuilding and refurbishment programs like the School Rebuilding Programme (SRP) that have been put in place to help reduce the negative impact on their learning experience.

Surveys of educators have also highlighted how widespread everyday issues have become. A 2024 survey of over 8,000 members of the National Education Union (NEU) in England and Wales highlights severe and widespread issues with school building conditions:

- Leaking Roofs: 68% of teachers reported that their buildings leaked when it rained.
- Mould and Damp: 45% of respondents reported issues with mould or damp in their schools.
- Temperature Extremes: 33% of teachers reported that their classrooms are "severely overheated" in the summer, while 16% described them as severely cold in the winter.

Some schools have faced particularly serious structural issues. Buildings constructed under fast-track programmes, including CLASP and other system-build methods, were later found to have significant defects. In some cases, this led to temporary school closures, demolition and full replacement through the School Rebuilding Programme.

CLASP buildings were prefabricated using a steel frame, with asbestos boards added for fire protection. There are around 1,644 of these buildings still in use across England. Over time, many have proven vulnerable to deterioration and damage. While some local authorities replaced them, others did not, leaving ongoing safety and maintenance challenges.

How Early Surveys Help

Early building surveys give a clear picture of a school's condition before problems escalate. Rather than reacting to failures, estates teams can plan with confidence and make informed decisions based on evidence.

Surveys help identify issues at an early stage, when repairs are usually simpler and more cost effective. They support planned maintenance instead of emergency works, reduce disruption to pupils and staff, and allow schools to budget more accurately for future repairs. Early intervention can also extend the life of a building.

For example, a survey might identify early signs of roof deterioration or moisture ingress that can be addressed through targeted repairs. Without this, the same issue could develop into a failure requiring urgent works, temporary closures, or costly replacements.

Long-Term Planning

A well-timed survey does more than highlight immediate concerns. It helps schools understand what may need attention over the coming years. This allows works to be prioritised and aligned with funding cycles, as well as opportunities such as applying Condition Improvement Funding. This forward planning is particularly important where funding is limited and competition for grants is high.

An Inclusive Approach

Every school is different. Building age, construction type, use and budget all play a role. Surveys should be clear, practical and focused on real solutions rather than technical language.

By investing in early surveys and planned maintenance, schools can protect their buildings, manage costs more effectively and provide safer environments for learning.

Conclusion

Many common building issues in schools develop gradually and can often be avoided with early surveys and planned maintenance. Identifying problems early allows schools to plan confidently, manage budgets, and reduce disruption to pupils and staff.

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