

THOMAS MILLS HIGH SCHOOL & 6TH FORM



TRUSTEES – POLICY DOCUMENT 93

Estates Vision & Strategy Plan– January 2026 – December 2036

Date approved by Board of Trustees	24 th March 2026
Next review due:	Academic Year 2028 - 2029
Policy review cycle:	Every 3 years
Policy Owner:	Headteacher and Business Manager

Vision Statement

'Together we aim high, discover talents and build a brighter future'

Thomas Mills High School is an Academy and a company limited by guarantee incorporated in England & Wales under number 7605059

1. Executive Summary

This Estates Strategy sets out a structured, long-term plan for how the school will invest in, maintain, and develop its buildings, grounds, and infrastructure. Its' purpose is to ensure the estate is safe, sustainable, fit for modern teaching, and able to support the school's educational goals over the next 5–10 years.

It provides clarity for governors, staff, and external partners by establishing a clear strategy for the learning environment and prioritising resources responsibly, so we achieve our vision statement of:-

Alignment with the Educational Vision

A well-planned estate underpins the school's broader vision for academic excellence, student wellbeing, and community engagement. The strategy aligns with the educational mission by:

- **Enabling high-quality teaching and learning**
Modern, flexible, well-maintained spaces support innovative pedagogy, digital learning, and personalised education.
- **Promoting inclusion and accessibility**
wherever possible ensuring buildings meet statutory accessibility requirements and reflect the school's commitment to equity for all learners.
- **Supporting wellbeing and safeguarding**
Safe, secure, and inviting spaces help create an environment where students feel valued and able to thrive.
- **Enhancing community use and partnerships**
Facilities designed for dual educational and community benefit help build strong local engagement and maximise value.
- **Embedding sustainability**
Energy-efficient, environmentally responsible buildings contribute to both financial stewardship and environmental education.

Key Priorities

1. Statutory Compliance & Safety

- Ensuring all buildings meet health and safety standards
- Fire safety, asbestos management, water hygiene, electrical compliance
- Maintaining a safe site layout, secure access, and robust safeguarding and security measures

2. Condition Improvements

- Tackling urgent repairs and addressing backlog maintenance
- Replacing or refurbishing aging roofs, windows, heating systems, and flooring
- Ensuring facilities remain operational, warm, safe, and dry

3. Suitability for Curriculum Delivery

- Modernising classrooms for digital and collaborative learning
- Updating specialist spaces (science labs, arts, DT, PE facilities)
- Creating flexible environments that support future curriculum needs

4. Capacity and Growth Planning

- Ensuring spaces match future student numbers
- Potential expansion or reconfiguration of key teaching or social areas
- Efficient use of existing space through redesign and scheduling

5. Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

- Reducing carbon footprint in line with DfE sustainability goals
- Improving insulation, LED lighting, BMS controls, solar PV, and efficient heating
- Increasing biodiversity and responsible management of outdoor spaces

6. Enhancing the Student Experience

- Maintaining & upgrading social spaces, dining, toilets, and circulation areas
 - Improving outdoor learning and recreation environments
 - Creating a site that fosters pride and belonging
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Planned Investment Approach

Ideally, we would use a balanced and financially sustainable approach to funding estate improvements, including:

Prioritised Phasing of Works

- Immediate Health & Safety and compliance works
- Medium-term refurbishments and condition improvements
- Long-term redevelopment or capital projects

Multi-Source Funding

- CIF bids
- Strategic use of devolved formula capital
- Targeted fundraising, grants, and community partnerships
- Energy-efficiency and sustainability funding streams

Value for Money and Lifecycle Planning

- Whole-life cost analysis for major investments
- Maximising the lifespan of existing assets through preventative maintenance
- Reducing long-term operational costs through sustainable upgrades

Transparent Governance and Reporting

- Clear decision-making processes with Trust oversight
- Annual review and refresh of priorities
- Alignment with the school's financial strategy and risk management

2. School Context

Thomas Mills is a single academy trust educating pupils from 11-18. The typical roll varies between 1050 – 1120 students, stands at 1059 but which can vary considerably year on year depending demographics and parental choice – currently 60% of our pupils come from outside our 'catchment' and we are therefore dependent on drawing those pupils in by reputation and results.

The site is of mixed age – from 1936 – 2023 – with a number of standalone buildings that have been added over time. There are benefits and disadvantages to our layout – pupil movement has to be carefully managed, but the open spaces in between provide space for break time and lunchtime use. The school has a large playing field in two sections with a total acreage of approximately 14 acres. This land is bisected by two public footpaths creating security and safeguarding challenges. The main school area is fenced to the rear to alleviate this, but access to the front of the school is currently unrestricted. Entrance systems are in place to minimize the possibility of unauthorized entry to buildings.

The older building on the site are in need of urgent improvement or replacement and CIF funding has been and is continuing to be applied for to this end.

3. Strategic Vision for the Estate

Long-Term Estate Vision

Thomas Mills High School aims to maintain an estate that enables outstanding learning, supports the school's ethos, and ensures every student and member of staff can thrive. Over the next 10–15 years, the estate will be developed to provide:

- Modern, flexible spaces that enhance teaching, learning, and student support
- A safe and resilient environment that meets all regulatory expectations
- Sustainable, energy-efficient facilities that reduce long-term costs
- Digital-ready infrastructure to support current and future technology demands
- A welcoming and inclusive setting for the entire school community

This vision places the estate at the heart of delivering high-quality education and supporting the long-term development of the school which includes a first class sixth form to serve this very rural area.

Funding this vision currently depends entirely on existing income from DfE grants, Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) Applications or Urgent Capital Support loans.

The current three-year budget does not allow for anything other than urgent repairs and essential maintenance to ensure a minimum level of operation, safety and compliance.

The 2023 whole site survey carried out by Barker Associates identified £3 million of investment was required to ensure the long term future of the site in its' current form. CIF applications have been made in 2025 for £1.1m of funding to replace the main school roof, and, replace the heating and water supply pipework and infrastructure. Should this not be successful, the trust may wish to consider making a school re-building application for the oldest part of the school instead. Enquiries with Barker Associates on this option suggest we are not in a poor enough condition overall to be considered for this, yet, despite the issues needing to be addressed above.

Teaching & Learning Support

The estate will be shaped around the needs of the curriculum, teaching staff, and students:

- **Flexible learning environments** capable of supporting traditional teaching, collaborative work, and independent study
- **Specialist teaching spaces**, including upgraded science labs, arts facilities, and vocational areas
- **Improved accessibility**, ensuring all students—including those with SEND—can fully participate in school life
- **Enhanced outdoor learning spaces**, supporting physical education, wellbeing, and curriculum enrichment
- **Staff working environments** designed for efficiency, privacy, and wellbeing

Investment decisions will prioritise educational impact and alignment with the school's long-term teaching strategy.

Safety & Security

The estate will uphold the highest standards of safety, ensuring that students, staff, and visitors are protected at all times:

- Robust safeguarding design principles including secure boundaries, monitored access points, and safe internal circulation
- Regular, proactive building condition assessments to maintain structural integrity and safe operation
- Modern fire detection and evacuation systems, complying fully with updated regulations
- Maintenance of a clean, hygienic environment that supports health and wellbeing
- A whole-school approach to risk management, ensuring the estate supports safe daily operations and emergency preparedness

Safety will always take precedence in decision-making regarding the estate's maintenance, refurbishment, and development.

Compliance & Regulatory Readiness

Thomas Mills High School will maintain a compliant, inspection-ready estate that adheres to all statutory requirements, including:

- DfE Good Estate Management for Schools (GEMS) principles
- Health & safety legislation and building regulations
- Asbestos management, water hygiene, fire safety, and electrical compliance
- Routine and planned maintenance schedules aligned with legal inspection requirements
- Transparent and well-documented compliance processes to ensure trustees, SMT, and regulatory bodies have full assurance
- Procurement and contractor management that meets best-practice standards

Compliance will be embedded into the school's daily operations and long-term estate planning.

Sustainability & Environmental Responsibility

Ideally, the estate will progressively move toward a low-carbon, environmentally responsible future:

- Implementation of a Net Zero strategy, targeting reductions in carbon emissions across heating, lighting, and operations
- Upgrades to energy-efficient systems, such as LED lighting, improved insulation, and low-carbon heating solutions
- Increasing use of renewable energy technologies where feasible
- Comprehensive waste reduction and recycling initiatives across the campus
- Biodiversity-enhancing landscape management, supporting outdoor learning and student wellbeing
- Sustainable procurement practices for all estate-related expenditure

The school aims to reduce long-term operational costs while contributing positively to the local and global environment.

Digital Readiness & Future Technology

As any modern school does, Thomas Mills requires a robust digital estate capable of supporting current and future learning needs:

- A resilient IT infrastructure, including high-speed networking and secure cloud-based platforms
- Classrooms equipped with interactive educational technologies that enhance teaching and student engagement
- Future-proofed cabling, server rooms, and network architecture to support long-term scalability
- Strong cyber-security measures aligned with national standards
- Support for hybrid learning, online assessment, and digital administration
- Integration of digital tools in estate management, including monitoring systems and automated building controls where appropriate

Digital readiness will ensure that Thomas Mills High remains competitive, innovative, and prepared for emerging technologies.

Funding for this relies on the Trust enabling a budget with sufficient year on year funding to main the existing infrastructure and enhance where possible and as technology develops.

Summary Statement

The estate of Thomas Mills High School & Sixth Form will be safe, sustainable, digitally advanced, fully compliant, and centred on supporting outstanding teaching and learning. This vision aligns long-term investment with the school's educational mission and provides a roadmap for a modern and resilient learning environment.

4. Governance and Responsibilities

Effective governance of the school estate ensures that buildings and grounds **are** safe, compliant, strategically managed and supportive of educational aims. This section outlines:

- (1) Responsible Bodies
 - (2) Estate Leads
 - (3) Competencies required
 - (4) Decision-making processes
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1. Responsible Bodies

Trust Board/Finance & Premises Committee (the governing body)

The governing body holds strategic oversight of the school estate, ensuring safety, compliance, and alignment with the school's long-term plans.

- The DfE confirms that governors of school trusts are the accountable body for strategic oversight and ensuring legal compliance.
- Trustees must ensure policies, strategies, and estate planning documents are reviewed and approved at board level.

Headteacher / Senior Management Team (SMT)

Responsible for operational implementation of estate management policies and directing day-to-day estate activities.

- The SMT is accountable to the governing body for operational estate management.

Responsible Body (RB) Duties

The DfE's School Estate Management Standards clarify that responsible bodies must maintain safe, compliant, and well-managed school estates, meeting statutory requirements and adopting strategic planning frameworks.

Local Authority & External Regulators

While Thomas Mills High may not be LA-maintained, statutory oversight frameworks—e.g. building safety, HSE requirements, fire regulations—remain applicable as per DfE guidance. We do work closely with Suffolk County Council who legally own the land of the school.

External Expertise

Thomas Mills engages and works with a number of external partners to ensure up to date knowledge and expertise is available to the board and staff across areas such as health & safety, law, HR, site safety and compliance.

2. Estate Leads (Operational Roles)

School Business Manager

Acts as the named individual responsible for day-to-day estate function delivery, including budgeting, compliance monitoring and contractor oversight.

- DfE standards require a named responsible individual with oversight of estate resources and budgeting.

Duties include:

- Managing maintenance and condition monitoring
- Ensuring statutory compliance (asbestos, fire, legionella, electrical)
- Procurement and contract management
- Maintaining the asset register and property data records

- Leading risk assessments and coordinating with specialist contractors
- Reporting compliance and condition issues to SMT and Trustees

Site / Premises Staff

Carry out operational maintenance, routine inspections, health and safety checks, and ensure safe daily operations.

- The competency framework details expected skills for premises staff, including compliance knowledge, emergency planning and safe systems of work.

Sustainability & Digital Leads (ITC Manager)

Increasingly required under updated DfE guidance:

- Sustainability leads support development of climate action plans at Level 2 and full strategic integration at Level 3.
 - Digital leads support BIM adoption, digital estate records, and cyber-resilient infrastructure.
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3. Competencies Required

Competency expectations are driven by the Estate Management Competency Framework and School Estate Management Standards.

Leadership Competencies

- Strategic estate planning and alignment with educational aims.
- Ability to interpret condition, safety, and compliance data to inform priorities.
- Engagement with trustees and senior leadership in estate decision-making.

Technical Competencies

- Understanding statutory health & safety (fire, asbestos, legionella, electrical safety).

- Ability to maintain accurate property data and asset registers.
- Knowledge of procurement rules, value-for-money principles, and contractor management.
- Awareness of digital records, BIM, and data-driven estate systems.

Sustainability Competencies

- Skills to support climate action planning and environmental performance tracking.
- Competence in identifying energy-efficiency improvements.

Compliance & Risk Management Competencies

- Understanding statutory requirements and how to evidence compliance.
 - Ability to deliver or oversee risk assessments, emergency planning, and incident response.
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4. Decision-Making Processes

Strategic Estate Planning Process

Governors and SMT must maintain:

- **Estate Vision** (5–10 years), approved by the governing body.
- **Estate Strategy** (3–5 years) outlining funding, priorities, and improvements.
- **Asset Management Plan (AMP)** (1–2 years) covering planned maintenance and capital planning.
- **Strategic Reviews** to assess performance and inform AMP updates.

Operational Decision-Making

The Business Manager leads operational decisions in line with the strategy, escalating risks to SMT and governors.

Decision-making is guided by DfE levels of practice:

- Level 1: Baseline compliance, asset registers, named responsible person.
- Level 2: Introduction of continuity planning, climate plans, and proactive contractor due diligence.
- Level 3: Fully effective practice, structured reviews, integration of sustainability and cyber security.
- Level 4: Advanced digital estate systems and integrated data-driven planning.

Budgeting & Prioritisation

- Budget planning must reflect estate condition, compliance risks, and long-term strategic goals.
- High-risk compliance issues (fire, asbestos, RAAC, water hygiene) must be prioritised first, as required by DfE safety guidance.

Governance Assurance & Reporting

- Governors must receive regular compliance updates, condition summaries, and risk reports.
 - Decisions must be minuted, demonstrating transparent compliance with statutory duties and strategic alignment.
 - Evidence-based compliance is required— must be able to *show* compliance, not merely assert it.
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Summary

Thomas Mills High School's estate governance structure ensures that the governing body provides strategic oversight, the SMT and Business Manager deliver operational excellence, and all roles meet the competency standards defined by the DfE. Decision-making is structured, risk-led, data-driven, and aligned with updated national expectations for safe, sustainable, compliant, and future-ready school estates.

5. Estate Baseline Information

All of the following are held by the Business Manager

- Asset register
- Condition information
- Compliance status

6. Estate Strategy (3–5 Years)

- Maintenance programme
 - To ensure compliance and maximise the lifespan of the buildings and infrastructure – it should be noted that the school is still playing catch up following many years of under investment and sub-standard estates management.
- Capital projects
 - In conjunction with external experts the following areas have highlighted
 - E10 – no longer fit for use
 - Main school – requires investment or re-build
 - Science Labs – updating to modern standards
 - 6th Form block – general updating including windows
 - Mills and Scrivener blocks – new windows
 - MUGA – replacement (end of life)
- Risk management
 - The trust monitors estates risk within its Risk Register (Audit & Risk Working group and Finance and Premises Committee)
 - the main risk is essentially not having funding to retain safe and compliant use of some areas.
- Sustainability plans.
 - The school has long been planning and investing in long term sustainability, e.g. solar panels and LED lighting conversion, and this will continue as technology and funding allows.

7. Financial Planning & Funding Strategy

As described above, funding is key to the 'success' of our estates strategy.

The school will continue to analyse revenue, capital, lifecycle costs, procurement, and operate a best value-for-money approach.

It is estimated that the school will require circa £1m per annum to fully achieve its estates strategy.

8. Performance Monitoring & KPIs

The school will continuously monitor compliance achievement, backlog changes, energy usage, carbon emissions, project metrics etc. and report to the Finance & Premises Committee regularly.

9. Stakeholder Engagement

The Trust recognizes that engagement with students, teachers, parents, authorities, and contractors is paramount and will be ongoing.

10. Supporting Documents

Further documentation supporting this strategy is available from the Business Manager, including;

- Condition surveys
- Compliance documents
- Site plans
- Maintenance logs, and registers.
- Health & safety documentation

Our Keys Aims;

	Ensure compliance	Asset & Condition Management	Evolve & Develop	A Fit for Purpose Estate	Steps to Net Zero
Year 1	Clear responsibilities matrix BCP and Disaster Recovery Plans Health & safety Audits and Reporting	Develop an Affordable Asset Management and Lifecycle plan and report to Trust board	Create a Trust vision for growth pathways and link to the Strategic plan	Analyse estate in light of school led - curriculum strategies	Establish Schools' carbon foot print
Year 2	Training for site staff in key areas of compliance Health & safety audit tracking and reporting system developed	Link AMP to budget monitoring	Analyse net capacity, demographic growth and site utilization to support capital funding applications	Site optimisation assessment	Further develop sustainability through options evaluation
Year 3	Develop a compliance monitoring system KPI data capture for Trust reporting	Condition data formalized in support of effective prioritisation	Review estates due diligence	Cross reference estate facilities against curriculum future needs	Expand green energy generation where possible and review current infrastructure
Year 4	Develop an estates Quality Assurance framework	Review supply chain and procurement protocols to ensure best value is being achieved	Review the sustainability strategy	Ensure access for all linked to equality and diversity	Carry out a thermal analysis to analyse heat loss
Year 5	Ensure skilled staffed and succession planning in place	Prepare new Condition surveys	Review capacity	Review sustainability strategy & Climate Action Plan	Prepare funding applications accordingly