



**Proposal to close Churchstoke C.P. School**

**Draft Community Impact Assessment**

**January 2021**

## Draft Community Impact Assessment – Churchstoke C.P. School

### i) Information on the proportion of pupils from the catchment area that attend the school

The closest provider for pupils attending Churchstoke C.P. School in January 2020 was as follows:

School	% of Pupils
Bishop's Castle Primary School	8.0%
Churchstoke C.P. School	80.0%
Long Mountain CofE Primary School	4.0%
Montgomery C. in W. School	4.0%
Penygloddfa C.P. School	4.0%

This suggests that 80% of pupils attending the school were attending their closest primary school, whilst 20% of pupils attending the school live closer to other primary schools.

### ii) After-school clubs and extra-curricular activities provided by the school

The school provides a range of after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities including the following:

- Cooking, coding, film club and Criw Cymraeg, guitar lessons, a series of enterprise activities
- Joint activities with the local Tennis Club and Churchstoke Bowling Club.
- Breakfast Club.
- After School Club which supports both the school and pre-school setting.
- Village Youth Club.
- Rainbows, Brownies and Guides, currently the only youth provision in the village outside school and pre-school.
- Charity fund raising is undertaken on an extracurricular basis, both for local and national appeals.
- The school have been involved in local history and environmental projects.

Due to the school's location within the geographical landscape, it has been the only Powys/Welsh representation in Buzz in the Borders via The John Muir Trust and The Stiperstones and Corndon Living Landscape project. Without this participation there would be dramatically reduced opportunities for local community participation in cross border initiatives such as this.

**iii) Any other facilities or services the school accommodates or services the school provides**

The school accommodates or provides the following other facilities or services:

- The local playgroup, Churchstoke Little Explorers, and Churchstoke Parent and Toddler Group, which also use both an outdoor area and the school field/forest school area. They have just received a £10,000 grant from Powys County Council Small Grants Scheme to develop the outdoor area and work is due to start during February half term.
- The school library which is also used by voluntary groups (e.g. Rainbows, Brownies and Guides)
- The school is a key holder for the Community Hall, which is on the school site.
- Heart defibrillator which belongs to the school but is available to all in the local area.

**iv) Other use by the community of the school building**

The school building is used by the community to provide the following activities:

- The school grounds are used as access to the Community Hall for all those using the hall.
- The school grounds are used by Churchstoke Football Club to access changing rooms.
- The school grounds are used by Rainbows, Brownies and Guides. It is also expected that a Scout Group will use the school grounds once the COVID-19 restrictions are over.
- The school field and forest school area is used for forest school activities for playgroup, toddlers and voluntary groups.
- The school grounds have been used for church and nursing home fetes, and for overflow parking for large funerals.

**v) Other links between the school and the community**

- With the neighbouring residential and nursing home, St Nicholas House. This has included visits from the children to perform for the residents and is very important for the health and well-being of both the residents and the children.
- St Nicholas' Church, including joint fund raising and social activities, plus support for Sunday School. Church leaders, WI and Mother's Union provide input into school assemblies, lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- With the local Co-op and Churchstoke Shopping Centre, with children visiting to perform for the public and to gain first-hand experience of the world of work.
- A Clothing Bank for the recycling of unwanted clothes.
- The school lends equipment to Playgroup, Toddlers, Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and other voluntary bodies, and the school gymnastics equipment is available to the public.
- The school supports youth participation in the local tennis club lessons and at the local Bowling Club.
- School and Friends of School events are community gatherings, open to the whole community. Many residents of St Nicholas' House, other older residents, vulnerable members of the community and those with pre-school families rely on these events for social interaction. Little else brings the community together, younger with older, including secondary age ex-pupils.
- The school is the repository for local history after closure of the local history group several years ago. A regular part of school work is to ensure that both written and verbal local history is kept alive, including photographic records of changes within the community.
- Due to school location within the geographical landscape, the school provides the only Powys/Welsh representation in Buzz in the Borders via The John Muir Trust and The Stiperstones and Corndon Living Landscape project. Without this both projects would lack any Welsh perspective.
- Close links to education and training on both sides of the border, particularly with feeder secondary schools, crucially The Community College, Bishop's Castle (which is the closest secondary school and therefore the main feeder secondary), ensuring continuity of learning, wellbeing and safeguarding on transfer.

**vi) If accommodation, facilities or services are provided by a school, where would they be provided in the event of closure?**

Should the proposal be implemented, then the intention is that all existing Churchstoke pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative school, and Churchstoke C.P. School would close. It is acknowledged that this would mean that there would be no school in Churchstoke, meaning that any community facilities provided by the school would no longer be available.

However, there is a Community Centre in Churchstoke, which would continue to be available to the community, and which could be used for community events. It is possible that closure of the school could impact on the Community Centre, due to the loss of any financial contributions by the school, however it is also possible that there would be increased use of the Community Centre should there be no school in the village.

**vii) Distance and travelling time involved in attending an alternative school of the same language category**

Should the proposal be implemented, then the intention is that all existing Churchstoke pupils would transfer to their nearest alternative school. For the majority of pupils, the closest alternative Powys schools would be Montgomery C. in W. School, Forden C. in W. School, Abermule C.P. School, Leighton C.P. School, Berriew C.P. School and St Michael's C. in W. VA School.

An analysis of pupils attending Churchstoke School in January 2020 suggests that the furthest distance to their nearest alternative school in Powys for pupils for whom Churchstoke School is currently the closest school would be 8.8 miles. The furthest distance to their nearest school regardless of location would be 4.6 miles.

Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, it is also acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc.

**viii) How parents' and pupils' engagement with the alternative school and any facilities it may offer could be supported**

Should the Council proceed with the statutory process and eventually implementation of the preferred option, support would be provided to pupils and their parents as part of the transition process, to ensure full engagement with their new schools.

**ix) Any wider implications e.g. impact on public transport provision, wider community safety issues**

- Concern about the impact on the local pre-school and toddler groups would not be viable if there was no school in the village – a number of families do not have transport to access the nearest alternatives and there is little public transport.
- Local knowledge is important in order to safeguard families.

- Monitoring of local safeguarding issues, including specific identification and preventative teaching work on local community issues (the danger spots on the main road play areas, areas where children congregate, the community field etc.) would be more difficult if the school was closed.
- On-going development of 60+ social and affordable houses within the village.
- Many of the pupils currently walk to school – this would not be possible if there was no school in Churchstoke.
- Impact on the Welsh language and Welsh identity in the village, particularly as a high proportion of families would be likely to choose alternative provision in Shropshire.
- Concern about community division due to pupils attending provision in a number of different locations.
- Flooding from the Camlad and Caebitra Rivers which occurs on an annual basis can prevent travel out of the village and would mean that pupils would not be able to access school outside the village

**x) Additional considerations for rural schools**

The School Organisation Code includes a number of additional considerations that are likely to be relevant when carrying out a community impact assessment for a rural school closure. As Churchstoke School is identified as a rural school, these factors are considered below.

- **Whether closure would encourage families with school-age children to leave the community or discourage young families from moving to the community**

Information received from the school suggests that a range of services and activities are provided by the school which could be attractive to families and which increase the attractiveness of the community to potential young families, such as the pre-school and toddler groups which are held on the site.

Should there be no school in Churchstoke, it is likely that there would be an impact on facilities associated with the school, which could have an impact on families with school-age children, and which could encourage these families to leave the community or discourage young families from moving to the community.

- **What impact closure might have on other services provided locally, for instance if the school is the only remaining public building in a community**

Information received from the school suggests that a wide range of services are provided in the school, and that the playgroup and the parents and toddler group would be particularly vulnerable should there be no school in Churchstoke.

Whilst there is a Community Hall in Churchstoke which would continue to be available should there be no school in the village, therefore community activities, events and other services could be provided here. However, it is acknowledged that the Hall relies on the support of the school, and that closure of the school could also impact on the viability of the hall in the longer term.

- **Whether, or not, the school is a real hub of community life, used for other purpose – such as public meetings, local events, fetes surgeries, and other get togethers – which would either cease or be diminished by being required to move elsewhere**

Information received from the school suggests that a wide range of events and activities take place in the school, and that there are many links between the school and the community. School events and Friends of the School events are whole community events, which bring the whole community together. There is a Community Hall in Churchstoke which would continue to be available should there be no school in the village, therefore community activities, events and other services could be provided here. However, it is acknowledged that without the school, it is possible that there would be a reduction in the number of events and activities available.

- **Whether or not the loss of the school, and potentially families, will have a detrimental effect on the wider economy of the community**

It is possible that the loss of the school, and potentially families would have a negative impact on recruitment for lower paid key worker jobs in the area, and on the ability of other employers to recruit to roles, including residential and care staff, shop staff and agricultural work.

In addition, should closure of the school lead to fewer young families moving to the village, this could also impact on businesses in the village and surrounding communities, such as the three pubs, the shops at Churchstoke Shopping Centre, local tradesmen etc.

Concern has also been expressed that the absence of a school in the village would lead to a reduction in house prices.

- **How parents' and pupils' engagement with the alternative school and any facilities it may offer could be supported (e.g. how pupils,**

**(particularly any less advantaged pupils) will be helped to participate in after school activities)**

Should the Council proceed with the statutory process and eventually implementation of the preferred option, support would be provided to pupils and their parents as part of the transition process, to ensure full engagement with their new schools. The nature of this support would depend on the needs of the parents / pupils, however this could include provision for effective transition to the receiving school by headteacher and class teachers.

It is acknowledged that there would be an impact on pupils' ability to participate in after school activities as there would be an additional travel requirement for parents in order to access school activities/events.

**- The overall effect of closure on the local community (including the loss of school based facilities which are used by the local community)**

The information received from the school indicates that the school currently plays an important role in the community, and that there are extensive links between the school and the community. Concern has been expressed that closure of the school would lead to social problems and isolation, and would impact on the Welsh identity of Churchstoke as it is possible that families would look to schools in Shropshire for alternative provision rather than schools in Powys.

Whilst there is a Community Centre in Churchstoke, As stated above, the closure of the school would mean that the Community Centre was not viable. The loss of the Community Centre would be catastrophic for community groups, with the loss of activities for children and young people, the elderly and families.

**xi) Conclusion**

It is clear that a wide range of extra curricular activities are available to pupils at Churchstoke C.P. School. Should there be no school in Churchstoke, pupils would transfer to alternative schools. These would be larger schools, and the expectation is that at least a similar range of activities would be available for pupils. However, it is acknowledged that pupils would need to travel to the alternative schools, which could impact on their ability to access activities, particularly where these take place after school.

The information received by the school also suggests that that there are extensive links between the school and the local community, and that many community activities are arranged in the school which are accessed by the community. It is therefore acknowledged that closure of the school could have an impact on the



community in terms of the services and activities available, and in particular on the availability of early years provision in Churchstoke.

Should there be no school in Churchstoke, any school facilities used by the community would no longer be available. There is a Community Hall in Churchstoke which would continue to be available, therefore community events and activities could take place here. However, it is acknowledged that the Hall relies on the support of the school, and that closure of the school could also impact on the viability of the hall in the longer term.

Closure of Churchstoke C.P. School would result in additional travel to school for pupils for whom Churchstoke is currently their closest school. Whilst free home to school transport would be provided to eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, it is also acknowledged that there could be an impact on some pupils' ability to access after school activities, and this could impact on the ability of parents to take part in school events, meetings etc. This would also mean that pupils who are currently able to walk to school would be unable to do so.

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