



**EDUCATION**

**OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

**SKIPNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016, Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Skipness Primary School. The Council agreed that in the event there are no registered pupils by the commencement of session 2018/19 the school be considered for formal closure through the statutory process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=548&MId=7207&Ver=4>

On 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation and an options appraisal, for Skipness Primary School. The Community Services Committee received a report presenting and outlining details of a potential formal consultation under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* (as amended) and a broad timeline of this process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=548&MId=8381&Ver=4>

The statutory process for the closure of a rural school is laid out in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* as amended by the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

The Act, as amended, contains a presumption against closure of a rural school and details specific requirements which the education authority is required to follow if they are formulating a proposal to close a rural school. This includes the introduction of a preliminary consultation process.

In addition, the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* sets out a new right for community organisations to request the transfer of local assets into local community ownership/management. Public bodies, including councils, must consider such requests and respond to them within a reasonable timescale.

Skipness Primary School has had zero pupils enrolled since elected members approved the mothballing.

On 5<sup>th</sup> September 2019, Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the preliminary requirements in relation to considering a rural school closure and look at an options

appraisal for Skipness Primary School. This review will enable the Education Service to identify and consider the options put forward.

The 2010 Act makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools that is in effect a presumption against their closure. There is a requirement to have special regard to the rural schools factors prior to formulating a proposal to close a rural school. In particular, it is necessary to consider any reasonable alternatives before considering closure. It is also necessary to consider the impact on the wider community of a potential closure and the impact of any different travel arrangements. These factors have been considered in this options appraisal.

## **2. REASONS FOR THE PROPOSAL**

**2.1** An authority that is contemplating formulating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the 2010 Act before starting to prepare its proposal paper. In particular, it must identify the underlying reasons why the future of the School is being considered, which are as follows:

1. Skipness Primary School has been mothballed for three years. The school roll was very low and not predicted to rise in the near future. This continues to be the situation.
2. Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. In September 2019 there were 18.5 fte vacancies for both Head Teachers and Teachers.
3. Whilst the School is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for maintenance.

The Council is therefore considering the future of Skipness Primary School. The various options are explored within this paper.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

Argyll and Bute is an area of outstanding natural beauty sitting within an ancient landscape with a strong cultural identity. Today, the culture of Argyll and Bute is reflected in its traditional industries of fishing, farming and crofting, sports such as shinty and in its world class musicians and artists as well as its modern commercial industries such as wind turbine production and fish farming.

Argyll and Bute is geographically the second largest authority in Scotland. Education is delivered in a range of settings including schools, partnerships and youth services.

### **3.1 Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan**

The Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan identifies Argyll and Bute as an area of Scotland with outstanding places, people and potential for a prosperous future for everyone. Our Council along with our Community Planning Partners, is committed to ensuring that Argyll and Bute's Economic Success is built on a Growing Population.

This strategic approach embraces the vision for our area, our communities and our people as outlined in the Corporate Plan. Our key service priorities support the delivery of our commitments in the plans, helping to focus on local outcomes that will achieve meaningful improvements for the area, our local communities and our citizens.

Councils have a statutory responsibility in terms of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 to achieve best value. Our Community Services Asset Management Plan provides a review of the property assets used to deliver services. It incorporates the School Estate Management Plan which reflects the local implementation of Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future, the national school estate strategy developed by the Scottish Government in conjunction with local authorities.

The aspirations, guiding principles and objectives contained within Building Better Schools are reflected throughout Education and Children's Services Asset Management Plan (SAMP) for schools and public buildings, both in the management of the existing assets and in the design and construction of developments.

### **3.2 Our Children Their Future**

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980* to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in Our Children, Their Future: Education Vision and Strategy.

### **3.3 Skipness and the Local Area - the Skipness Primary School Setting**

Skipness is a scenically beautiful area situated on the most North Westerly point of the Kintyre peninsula. Skipness is a small and picturesque village overlooking the Kilbrannan sound towards the Isle

of Arran, whose name means ‘point of the ships’ in ancient Nordic tongue. The Kintyre Way passes through the village of Skipness on its way from Tarbert to Southend, encouraging outdoor enthusiasts to take in the natural beauty of the area. Skipness village is home to the historic attractions of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Skipness Castle and Kilbrannan Chapel from the same time period which are open to the public and attracts visitors throughout the year.

### 3.4 The School within the Community

Skipness Primary School was very active within the community. It was a focus for social and educational events. The pupils invited the community to attend events on many occasions every year. Whilst being mothballed, the school no longer continues to be used for meetings. With Skipness Village Hall, a community managed charity that host various community events and can be hired privately, being the hub of the village.

### 3.5 Population

Argyll and Bute has an average population density of just 0.13 persons per hectare. This coupled with the changing demographic profile of the area presents one of our greatest challenges. The table below refers directly to the Skipness area showing the changing population from census 2001 to census 2011:

Table 1: Population Information

Skipness Area Census Ref : 60QD000575			
2001		2011	
Total Resident Population	140	Total Resident Population	136
% under 16	25.71	% under 16	15.4
% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	55.71	% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	66.2
% pensionable age and over	18.57	% pensionable age and over	16.8

It is recognised that the census area and the catchment area of Skipness Primary School differ slightly. Currently there are 34 permanent community members in the village of Skipness.

### 3.6 Development and House Building

The current Local Development Plan (LDP) was adopted in March 2015. A new Local Development Plan (LDP2), which will set out planning and development proposals for the next 10 years from 2020 and a vision for 20 years, is currently being prepared. The Argyll and

Bute Local Development Plan provides the local planning framework for the Council area, excluding the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park area. The Plan is divided into the written statement and proposals maps. The written statement provides the general policy context against which planning applications for new development proposals should be assessed. This is supported by the proposals maps which show the range of development opportunities and constraints within the area, for example:

- the key development areas i.e. the allocations for housing, industry and business, community facilities and infrastructure;
- the potential areas for future development (Potential Development Areas);
- areas requiring actions such as environmental improvement or regeneration (Areas for Action); and
- environmental designations such as national Scenic Areas, Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas and Local Nature Conservation Sites.

*Appendix 1* shows the LDP for Skipness.

*Appendix 2* shows the LDP for Tarbert.

*Appendix 3* provides the key for Local Development Plans.

### **3.7 Skipness Primary School**

Skipness Primary School was built in 1886 and is an attractive building of local granite in an exceptionally scenic setting. The school is co-educational and non-denominational and has a catchment area extending from Cour to Cnoc na Meine and across to Whitehouse. The school has two classrooms, an art area and general purpose room as well as an office, a separate canteen building and a large playground.

*Appendix 4* shows the Skipness Primary School Floor Plan.

Skipness Primary School is 12.6 miles from Tarbert Primary School. The area is sparsely populated. The School is situated on the side of a single track road that leads from Claonaig to Skipness.

The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2017 classifies Skipness Primary School as 'very remote rural'. This is defined as an area with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more. Skipness Primary is one of 5 primary schools associated with Tarbert Academy.

### **3.8 Tarbert Primary School**

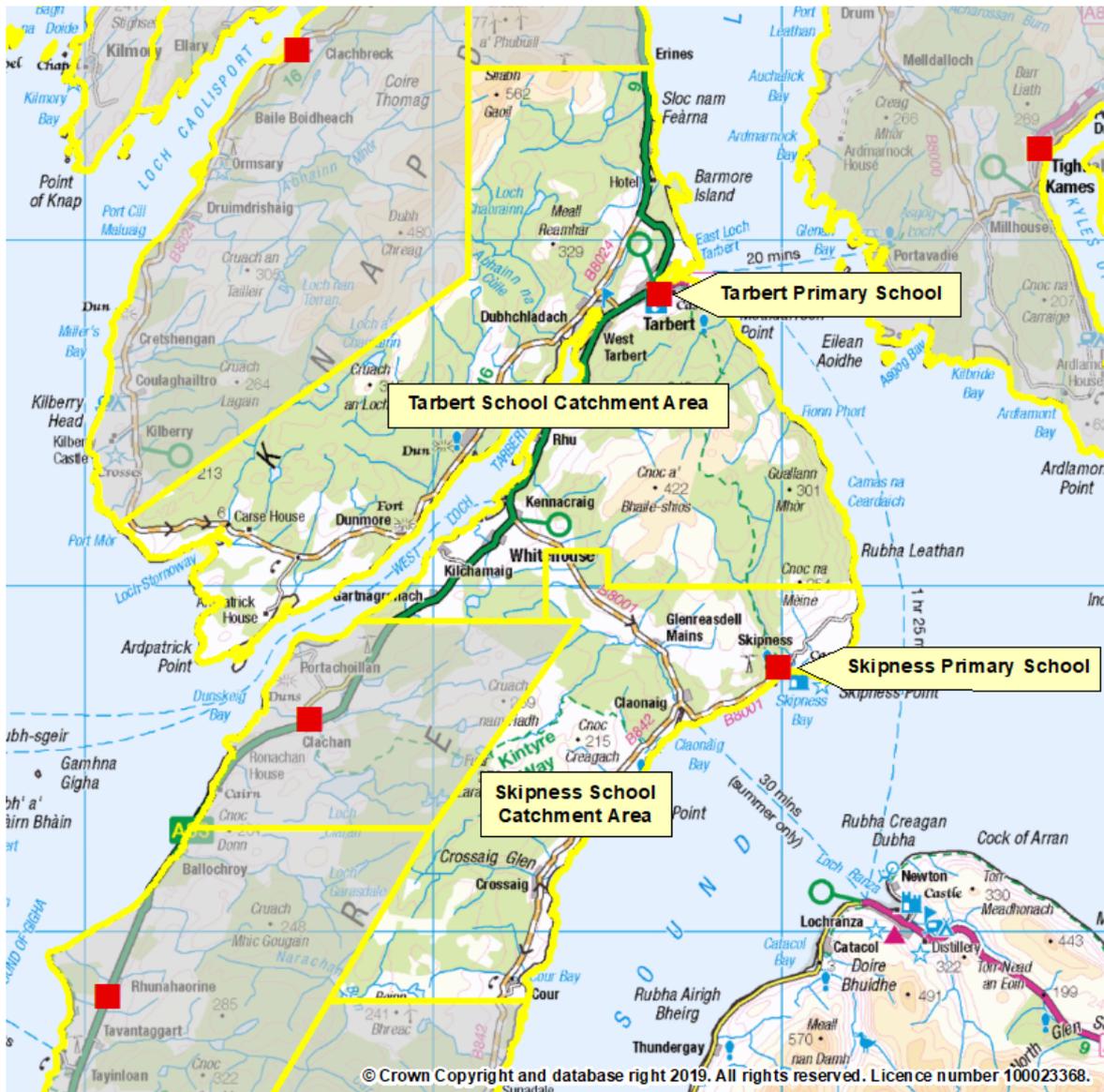
Following the mothballing of Skipness Primary School, children currently attend Tarbert Primary School. Tarbert Primary School is a non-denominational and co-educational school situated in the village of Tarbert at 4 Eastfield, off the main A83 road. Tarbert Academy is a 3-18 school comprising three stages of schooling. The Pre-5 unit serves the village and near environs of Tarbert. The Primary serves the village and the surrounding community; and the Secondary also serves the communities of South Knapdale and North Kintyre. The original school building was constructed in 1896 and is still used today. New accommodation was phased in during the mid-1990s and is used to house the Primary, Assembly Hall, Office and School Kitchen. In the year 2000, the School also became home to a Pre-5 unit and in 2014 an Early Level classroom with its own toilet block, kitchen and outdoor play area was built in the Primary Department. The building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the Primary School.

*Appendix 5* shows the Tarbert Primary School Floor Plan.

The outdoor area provides many opportunities for learning. A joint school and community project was completed to provide and maintain the all-weather pitch adjacent to the school. There is a hard play area complemented by grass play areas. There are willow dens to play in and access to the nearby cycle track.

The Primary School building has facilities for pupils, visitors and special access needs. The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2017 classifies Tarbert Primary School as 'very remote rural'. Tarbert Academy is the associated Secondary School for Skipness and Clachan. Pupils at Achahoish Primary can choose between Tarbert Academy and Lochgilphead High and pupils from Rhunahaorine and Gigha are given the choice between Tarbert Academy and Campbeltown Grammar.

The Map below shows the adjoining catchment areas of Skipness and Tarbert Primary Schools Catchment Areas:



### 3.9 Pupil Numbers

Pupil projections, and data for 2019 - 2020 are based on the 2018 pupil census, a return prepared annually for the Scottish Government. Past pupil numbers are historic data from past pupil censuses. Pupil projections for future P1 intakes are from NHS data taken from children registered with GP practices in the area. This data is anonymised.

Table 2 shows the historic and current pupil numbers for both Skipness and Tarbert Primary schools:

Table 2:	Skipness PS	Tarbert PS
	Roll	Roll
<b>Capacity</b>	26	130
<b>2005-06</b>	7	91

<b>2006-07</b>	7	89
<b>2007-08</b>	7	92
<b>2008-09</b>	6	95
<b>2009-2010</b>	1	92
<b>2010-2011</b>	3	88
<b>2011-2012</b>	3	83
<b>2012-2013</b>	4	79
<b>2013-2014</b>	3	81
<b>2014-2015</b>	3	83
<b>2015-2016</b>	0	94
<b>2016-2017</b>	0	93
<b>2017-2018</b>	0	96
<b>2018-19</b>	0	102
<b>2019-20</b>	0	102

Table 3 shows projected rolls for Tarbert Primary School and estimated numbers of pupils in the Skipness Primary School catchment area according to figures held by Argyll and Bute Council:

<b>Table 3:</b>	<b>Skipness PS</b>	<b>Tarbert PS</b>
	Roll	Roll
<b>Capacity</b>	26	154
<b>2020 -2021</b>	1	109*
<b>2021 -2022</b>	1	106*
<b>2022-2023</b>	1	103*

\* A prediction based on information available July 2019.

#### **4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 Meetings**

A Community Engagement Meeting was held in Skipness Village Hall, on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019 from 14:30-18:00 hours. This was to seek the views of the community on the future of Skipness School. This meeting was attended by 22 people. There was also a meeting in Tarbert Academy to gather opinions from the young people from within the catchment area for Skipness School. Three secondary aged young people attended as there are currently no primary aged pupils from the Skipness catchment area attending Tarbert Primary.

## 4.2 Content of Meetings

Attendees at the meetings were given an overview of the information that the Council would be using in this Options Appraisal, this included pupil projections, financial information, development information and local services and facilities.

The questions were as follows:

*Over the last three years, what has been the effect of mothballing Skipness School on you, your family and community?*

*In your view what are the pros/cons of the following options:*

- *Continue with mothballing*
- *Re- open the school*
- *Close the school*
- *Re-open the school but widen the catchment area*

Attendees also noted questions regarding the future of the school, and points of information that should be considered in the Options Appraisal.

## 4.3 Feedback

There was a range of viewpoints on the future of Skipness School:

- **Community and Parents**

The majority of the community felt that the most viable option is to formally close the school and were in agreement that the low numbers of children did not make the re-opening of the school realistic. There was a small percentage of people in support of continued mothballing in order to retain the building in case of future need.

- **Children/young people**

The young people voiced they loved being at school at Skipness Primary but that there are currently no pupils at Skipness Primary and closing the school made sense to them.

- **Staff**

Staff members were sad at the thought of the School being closed but acknowledged that without a significant number of pupils re-opening the school is not viable.

## **General Comments:**

*'Closing is the most sensible option.'*

*'Tarbert isn't too far and there is an existing bus service.'*

*'Continued mothballing would mean further deterioration to the building and would be a waste of the premises.'*

*'Changing catchment area could impact other small local schools and wouldn't necessarily mean more pupils for the school as parents have a choice of where to send their children.'*

*'If there were kids there I feel they would miss out on the great learning experience. But I understand there's no point keeping a school open if there isn't anyone in the classrooms.'*

## **5.0 THE PROPOSAL AND REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSAL AS CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Skipness Primary School has been mothballed for 3 years. The school roll was very low and not predicted to rise in the near future. This continues to be the situation. There is very little support for the reopening of the school.

Whilst the building is mothballed it continues to deteriorate. The Community is very proactive and is planning a future for the building. Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. In September 2019 there were 18.5 fte vacancies for both Head Teachers and Teachers.

The Council is required to consider the future of Skipness Primary School. The following options are explored within this paper:

- a) Re-open Skipness Primary School.
- b) Continued Mothballing of Skipness Primary with the pupils zoned to Tarbert Primary School.
- c) Re-open Skipness Primary School and realign its catchment area.
- d) Close Skipness Primary School and realign its catchment area to Tarbert Primary School.

## 6. OPTION A: RE-OPEN SKIPNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL

### 6.1 Community Feedback

Of the 22 community members that attended the Options Appraisal engagement event, no one was in support of re-opening the School because the lack of feasibility due to low pupil numbers.

### 6.2 Pupil Numbers

If the school were to reopen in August 2020, the maximum pupil numbers from the catchment would be one. There are no pupils currently within the catchment area but children would attend Tarbert Primary School. It has been stated that without a viable number of pupils for the School parents would not be considering placing their children at attend Skipness Primary School if it were to re-open.

If the school were to re-open sustainability may not be viable due to the fact that pupil numbers over the next four years are not predicted to rise and are well below the capacity of the school building.

Table 4: Pupil Numbers

Skipness Primary	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Approved Capacity	26	26	26
Roll Projection	1	1	1

### 6.3 Financial Information

The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£143,666<sup>1</sup>**

The annual cost of mothballing Skipness Primary School is **£1,644**.

The cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£75,000**.

### 6.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

The reasons why the future of Skipness Primary School is being considered are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Skipness Primary School to increase. Skipness Primary School is currently mothballed and there

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<sup>1</sup> Annual costs for running a comparative school for Skipness Primary School.

are no current pupils in the Skipness catchment area. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

#### 6.4.1 Community Impact

The reopening of the school would enable the premises to be used by the community. It would also be a possibility that the school pupils would invite the community to specific events. The presence of a school and the facilities/activities that may be offered could make the area a more attractive place to live. Reopening the school may therefore encourage families with school age children to move to the community. This in turn may make the community more sustainable.

However the community have demonstrated no wish for the school to reopen. Almost all who attended the community engagement indicated the need for the school to become a facility for the community to use rather than an educational establishment.

There have been several community events held at the school including Community Council Meetings and social events run by Friends of Skipness School. All of which have been reported to be well attended. Respondents noted the negative impact of the school mothballing on the community as:

- The visual impact on the community of the mothballed school.
- The continued deterioration of the building.

If the school were to reopen as an educational establishment there would be an economic impact with respect to the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard. There would also be costs relating to staffing, and ongoing maintenance. Maintenance and building costs would also have to be met by the community if the school were to reopen as a community hub. The reopening of the school and the potential relocation of families may have a positive effect on the wider economy of the community.

#### 6.4.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the

A83. Travel time is approximately 25 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for almost three years. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Skipness community. If Skipness Primary School was to reopen there could be a positive impact on the health and wellbeing and education of pupils who are able to walk or cycle to school. Staff would either travel to the school by car, or if they live locally could walk or cycle. There may be a positive environmental impact as the use of vehicles to transport pupils may decrease. Conversely, there could be increased car usage by staff which may mean these travel arrangements have a negative environmental impact. The respective positive and negative impact may therefore balance.

### **6.5 Educational Benefits**

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

With respect to outdoor learning community spaces could be used either in the school grounds or in the immediate neighbourhood if the school were to reopen. Outdoor learning is provided by all schools.

There would be issues with respect to the current condition and suitability of the school buildings and facilities which would negatively impact learning and teaching.

### **6.6 Summary**

The 22 people who attended the consultation the majority were not in favour of reopening Skipness Primary as a school. If the school reopened, pupil numbers would be zero, as of the September 2018 census, and this is predicted to increase by 1 over the next three years.

There are financial implications if the school is to be reopened. The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£143,666<sup>2</sup>**, with the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£75,000**.

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<sup>2</sup> Annual costs for running a comparative school for Skipness.

If the School was to be reopened, the premises would be able to be used by the community as a hub, in addition to its use as an educational facility. The reopening of the School may encourage families with school age children to move to the community, which may make the community more sustainable.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the A83. Travel time is approximately 25 minutes. Adverse weather can be a factor, however this is the same for other local schools and areas. The travel arrangements have been in place for almost 3 years. Should the school reopen, there may be a positive environmental impact as the use of vehicles to transport pupils may decrease. Conversely, there could be increased car usage by staff which may mean these travel arrangements have a negative environmental impact. The positive and negative impact may balance.

There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

When considering the above alongside projected low pupil numbers, the challenges in recruiting teaching staff and the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard and the lack of local support for reopening Skipness Primary School this is not considered to be a reasonable option.

## **7. OPTION B: CONTINUED MOTHBALLING OF SKIPNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS ZONED TO TARBERT PRIMARY SCHOOL**

The Statutory Guidance for the 2010 Act, in relation to mothballing, states *“the maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote.”* Skipness Primary School has been mothballed for 3 years.

### **7.1 Community Feedback**

There are many ideas for the future of the building being taken forward by the community as a real hub for community life. There was a significant view at the community meeting that mothballing the school

over a long period is wasteful due to deterioration of the property and should not be prolonged:

*'The building is deteriorating and is becoming an eye-sore.'*

*'Continued mothballing would mean further deterioration to the building and would be a waste of the premises.'*

*'The school building has been neglected, there is significant water ingress, the kitchen has been removed and general disrepair is apparent.'*

*'The building should be used for a purpose to benefit the community.'*

## **7.2 Pupil Numbers**

Pupil numbers are not projected to increase over the next 4 years, as per Table 4 above.

## **7.3 Financial Information**

The current annual cost (2019/20) to the Council of the mothballed Skipness Primary School is **£1,644**. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs. Neither does it take account of the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school which is **£75,000**. There is no current annual transport cost of taking pupils to alternative schools.

## **7.4 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Skipness Primary School is being considered are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Skipness Primary School to increase. Skipness Primary School is currently mothballed and although there are currently no registered pupils, pupils would be rezoned to another local school. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

### **7.4.1 *Community Impact***

If pupils are to continue their education in Tarbert Primary School there would be no change to the current impact on the community. If the mothballing of Skipness was to continue the building would deteriorate further and eventually become unavailable. This could have a detrimental effect on the

sustainability of the Skipness community. At present the school grounds are available for community use. For example, the tarmac area is used as parking for Village Hall events and visiting children use the play areas. The community view the buildings and grounds as an opportunity to develop a community hub and there were multiple suggestions for possible usage. This may make the area a more attractive place to live.

#### 7.4.2 *Travel Arrangements*

There is no change to the travel arrangements that are currently in place nor to the environmental impact from these. The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the A83. Travel time is approximately 25 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for almost three years. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Skipness community. Continued mothballing of Skipness Primary School would have no effect on current staff travel. The small number of children has minimal effect on staffing within the receiving primary schools.

### 7.5 **Educational Benefits**

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Both Tarbert and Skipness are remote rural schools. Each school is set within a very remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Skipness area, attending Tarbert Primary School are benefitting from the rural broader environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. Outdoor learning is currently provided at Tarbert Primary.

The co-location of the nursery and the primary classes at Tarbert Primary enhances the transition process for the children moving from Nursery into Primary one, through joint educational processes and liaison between the two settings. Transition to secondary school is enhanced through joint planning and educational experiences.

## 7.6 Summary

The majority of people who attended the consultation were not in favour of continuing the three year mothballing of Skipness Primary School. There was a significant view at the community meetings that mothballing the school over a long period was wasteful due to deterioration of the property and potentially affected sustainability of the community. Pupil numbers are not predicted to rise in terms of pre-school children living within the catchment area. Mothballing had no positive impact on the reasons for the proposal.

The current annual cost (2019/20) to the Council of the mothballed Skipness Primary School is **£1,644**. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs. Neither does it take account of the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school which is **£75,000**. There is no current annual transport cost for taking pupils to an alternative school.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the A83. Travel time is approximately twenty-five minutes. Adverse weather can be a factor, however this is the same for other local schools and areas. The travel arrangements have been in place for more than four years. Should the school continue to be mothballed these travel arrangements would continue.

There are no specific educational benefits from continuing the mothballing of Skipness Primary school.

On the basis that pupil numbers are not expected to increase and the building's mothballing is not of benefit to the community or the Council, continued mothballing of Skipness Primary School is not viewed as a reasonable option.

## 8. **OPTION C: RE-OPEN SKIPNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL AND EXTEND ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THE JUNCTION OF THE B8001 AND A83, INCLUDING THE VILLAGE OF WHITEHOUSE**

### 8.1 **Community Feedback**

The existing catchment area for Skipness School is very rural and very sparsely populated.

When considering the option to realign the catchment area of Skipness, the boundary for Skipness School has been hypothetically moved to the junction of the B8001 and the A83 and including the village of Whitehouse.

Community views are:

*‘Changing catchment area could impact other small local schools and wouldn’t necessarily mean more pupils for the school as parents have a choice of where to send their children.’*

## **8.2 Pupil Numbers**

The pupil numbers within this new catchment area would not increase the roll significantly. As part of any possible forthcoming consultation, there would be discussions with the parent body of Tarbert Primary School regarding the future of Skipness School. There was no representation from the Parent Council at the Options Appraisal Meeting. It was felt by attendees at the meeting that moving the catchment area of Skipness Primary School was not an option due to the remote nature of the location, the road and accepted direction of travel.

## **8.3 Financial Information**

The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£143,666<sup>3</sup>** per annum.

To bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school would cost **£75,000**.

The cost to use minibuses to transport the children to Skipness Primary School would be **£14,738<sup>4</sup>** (These transport costs are calculated assuming the boundary has moved to include all children who live within the junction of the B8001 and the A83).

There would also be a financial cost associated with the recruitment of additional staff and ongoing associated costs.

## **8.4 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Skipness Primary School is being reviewed are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no

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<sup>3</sup> Annual costs for running a comparative school for Skipness.

<sup>4</sup> This would be the cost of one mini bus.

expectation for the pupil numbers at Skipness Primary School to increase. Skipness Primary School is currently mothballed and the pupils are rezoned to Tarbert Primary School.

To reopen Skipness Primary School **and** realign its catchment area could increase the pupil numbers if families were to send their children to Skipness Primary School.

#### 8.4.1 Community Impact

The reopening of the school would enable the premises to be used by the community. It would also be a possibility that the school pupils would invite the community in to specific events. The presence of a school and the facilities/activities that may be offered could make the area a more attractive place to live. Reopening the school may therefore encourage families with school age children to move to the community. This in turn may make the community more sustainable. However, the community has given very little support for this option.

If the school were to reopen as an educational establishment there would be an economic impact with respect to the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard. There would also be costs relating to staffing, and ongoing maintenance. The reopening of the school and the potential relocation of families may have a positive effect on the wider economy of the community.

#### 8.4.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the A83. Travel for children within this new boundary would be less than thirty minutes and would be a new 'bus route'. Therefore, appropriate risk assessments would be necessary. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Skipness community.

If Skipness Primary School was to reopen there could be a positive impact on the health and wellbeing and education of pupils who are able to walk or cycle to school. Local members of staff could also walk or cycle to school. There would be an increase in the number of pupils at the school and therefore an increase in staff numbers. There could be increased car usage by staff resulting in a negative environmental impact.

## 8.5 Educational Benefits

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the School as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Both Tarbert and Skipness are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Skipness area that currently attend Tarbert Primary School benefit from the broader environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. Outdoor learning is currently provided at Tarbert Primary School.

The outdoor facilities either in the school grounds or in the immediate neighbourhood of Skipness Primary School would offer the opportunity to develop a curriculum that maximises the use of the local environment supporting the individual needs of the learners.

## 8.6 Summary

The majority of people who attended the consultation were not in favour of reopening Skipness Primary as a school, and realigning its catchment area due to the remote nature of the school's location.

There are financial implications if the school is to be reopened. The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£143,666<sup>5</sup>**, with the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£75,000**.

If the School was to be reopened, the premises would be able to be used by the community, in addition to its use as an educational facility. The reopening of the school may encourage families with school age children to move to the community, which may make the community more sustainable.

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<sup>5</sup> Annual costs for running a comparative school for Skipness.

The travel distance from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the A83. Travel for children within this new boundary would be less than 30 minutes and would be an existing 'bus route'.

There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Due to the geographic location of this very remote rural primary school it is unlikely that the catchment area could be made more sustainable. While this option could in theory contribute to sustainability of the community that may not be the case as most pupils in the neighbouring catchment area travel in the direction Tarbert, towards the larger centre of population, and not towards Skipness. It would require pupils who may have already settled in Tarbert Primary School to move to Skipness Primary School. Skipness families have stated they would not move their children back to Skipness without viable pupil numbers if it reopened. All families would be entitled to submit a placing request to attend Tarbert Primary School. It is unlikely that pupil numbers would increase significantly.

When considering the above, alongside the challenges in recruiting teaching staff, the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard and the lack of local support for reopening Skipness Primary School, this is not considered to be a reasonable option.

## **9. OPTION D: CLOSE SKIPNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR TARBERT PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT SKIPNESS CATCHMENT AREA**

### **9.1 Community Feedback**

The majority of people who attended the Options Appraisal meeting were not in favour of reopening Skipness Primary as a school. They commented that there were not enough children to support re-opening the School. Additionally, with respect to low numbers in future school roll projections, the sustainability of the School did not support re-opening of the School. Comments in relation to the closure of Skipness Primary School and attendance at Tarbert Primary School were positive:

*'It's not realistic to re-open the school as there are not enough young people.'*

*'Tarbert isn't too far and there is an existing bus service.'*

Young people said:

*'If there were enough kids I think the community would want it to stay open.'*

*'I found it easy to come to Tarbert, I enjoyed company of new friends transition was ok.'*

Many community members commented on the school premises and potential for this to become a community asset:

*'The building to be used for a purpose to benefit the community for example a community hub with a shop and café.'*

*'The community has lost the shop, post office and now school, we feel it is crucially important that this building is retained to build the community.'*

Community members discussed pursuing options for use of the building as a community hub.

## 9.2 Pupil Numbers

Table 5: Schools Occupancy:

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2019/2020</i>	<i>2020/21</i>
<i>Approved Capacity</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Projected Roll</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Skipness Projected Roll</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Occupancy</i>	<i>78.5%</i>	<i>83.9%</i>

Pupils from Skipness Primary catchment area would attend Tarbert Primary School, as there are currently no pupils attending Skipness there is no projected addition to school roll at Tarbert Primary School. The current occupancy rate for Tarbert Primary School is 78.5%.

### **9.3 Financial Information**

As there are currently no pupils at Skipness Primary there is no annual cost to transport pupils to alternative schools. An existing West Coast bus means that there would be no additional annual transport costs. If Skipness Primary School were to be closed it would generate savings of **£1,644** - the current annual cost of mothballing (2019/20) to the Council. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs.

### **9.4 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Skipness Primary School is being reviewed are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Skipness Primary School to increase. Skipness Primary School is currently mothballed and were there pupils they would be rezoned to other schools. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

#### **9.4.1 Community Impact**

The community overwhelmingly supported closure of the school with the building and adjoining grounds being retained for community use. Within Skipness there is a village hall. All people who attended the consultation strongly stated the school building should be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the community's access to the premises and the visual impact of the village. While it is accepted that school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, a vibrant community hub could be an asset to a community. This could potentially have a very positive impact on sustainability of the community if this option were to progress. If the Community wished to create a community hub, they would require to find a mechanism to acquire the property from the Council and deliver that aspiration. The buildings forming the school premises are situated within walking distance of the village. If the local plans for the building progress, this would have a positive impact on the sustainability of the village. Formal closure of the school would mean that these plans could potentially be progressed by the community.

#### **9.4.2 Travel Arrangements**

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the A83. Travel time is approximately 25 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for three years. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Skipness community. This

option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Skipness Primary School, in terms of travel would have a neutral effect on the environment. There is currently no annual transport cost for pupils to travel to Tarbert Primary School and the use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would not incur additional costs in the immediate future.

## **9.5 Educational Benefits**

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Both Tarbert and Skipness are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Skipness area who would attend Tarbert Primary School are benefitting from the rural broader environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. Outdoor learning is currently provided at Tarbert Primary. The pupils would then be transitioning to Tarbert Academy with an established friendship group.

In Tarbert Primary School children are taught in classes composed of children from more than one year group. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social group. They are able to interact and socialise with groups of children of their own gender, take part in team activities and move with their peers to secondary school.

## **9.6 Summary**

The majority of people who attended the consultation were in favour of closing Skipness Primary as a school, and realigning the catchment area of Tarbert Primary School due to the remote nature of the school's location. They also commented on the potential for the school premises to be used as a community asset.

Current capacity for Tarbert Primary School is 78.5%. As there are currently no pupils in the Skipness catchment area, there is no annual cost to transport pupils to Tarbert Primary school and use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would not incur additional costs.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the A83 and this option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Skipness Primary School would therefore have a neutral effect on the environment. Tarbert Academy currently accommodates pupils from Skipness School and pupil numbers are not projected to increase significantly. Tarbert Primary has capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers.

In Tarbert Primary School, children benefit from a positive learning environment with learning and teaching which is better matched to the needs of the young people who attend the school. In addition there are more opportunities for personal and social development in this setting.

This has been identified as a reasonable option for further consideration.

## 11. OVERVIEW OF OPTIONS

Option	Option Description	Outcome
A	Re-open Skipness Primary School with the existing catchment area	Not a reasonable option.
B	Continued Mothballing of Skipness Primary School with the pupils zoned to Primary School	Not a reasonable option.
C	Re-open Skipness Primary School and extend its catchment area to the junction of the B8001 and A83 including the village of Whitehouse.	Not a reasonable option
D	Close Skipness Primary School and realign the catchment area of Tarbert Primary School to include the current catchment area for Skipness Primary School.	A reasonable option with strong representation that the school becomes a facility the community can develop.

## 12. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF REASONABLE OPTION: CLOSE SKIPNESS PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR TARBERT PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT SKIPNESS CATCHMENT AREA

### 12.1 Pupil Projections

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2019/2020</i>	<i>2020/21</i>
<i>Approved Capacity</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Projected Roll</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Skipness Projected Roll</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Occupancy</i>	<i>78.5%</i>	<i>83.9%</i>

### 12.2 Educational Benefits

This statement focusses on Tarbert Primary School, which is the school Skipness Pupils have been attending since September 2016.

#### 12.2.1 Learning and Teaching

The curriculum includes a broad range of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, to help every child and young person to develop knowledge, skills and attributes for success in learning, life and work.

In Tarbert Primary School, children are encouraged to be eager and active participants who are engaged, resilient and highly motivated during their learning. Children know that their views are sought, valued and acted upon. The learning environment encourages high level of achievement, providing a wide range of opportunities for children to achieve their full potential within the four contexts of learning.

In Tarbert Primary School children may be taught in classes composed of children from more than one year group. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social

group. They are able to interact and socialise with groups of children of varying sizes and composition, take part in team activities and move with their peers to secondary school.

There is a continual challenge for all schools to deliver a school improvement agenda and deliver effectively the principles and outcomes of curriculum for excellence. The National Improvement Framework priorities include raising attainment for all, and closing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children.

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. At Tarbert Primary School, staff are challenged and supported through a range of continuous professional development and review opportunities gained by working and learning with a range of colleagues. Tarbert Primary School is part of the Kintyre Schools Cluster, and a smaller local cluster which means that staff can be supported together, moderation and tracking of pupil progress is enabled and staff work across stage appropriate groups. Colleagues within Tarbert Primary School are able to support and challenge each other on a daily basis. The whole staff are able to bring a range of talents and skills to benefit outcomes for learners.

Tarbert Primary School encourages nurturing and positivity. One aspect of this work is a successful Buddy System. Children from different stages work and learn together. This vertical support is particularly evident on Sports Day and in the dining room when groups of children are together in a social context. This system develops and benefits both the 'buddy' and the 'buddied'. To implement this system there needs to be children across a range of stages in the school.

Both Tarbert and Skipness are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Skipness area,

who would attend Tarbert Primary School would benefit from the rural broader environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment.

The co-location of the nursery and the primary classes at Tarbert Primary School enhances the transition process for the children moving from Nursery in to Primary one, through joint educational processes and liaison between the two settings.

#### 12.2.2 Outcomes

Through the GIRFEC practice model, meeting the needs of every child continues to be a priority and teachers carefully plan and assess to ensure each child has the opportunity to reach their potential. Careful tracking and monitoring procedures are in place to evidence pupil progress. This includes professional dialogue with teachers, learning discussions with children, classroom observations, assessment and looking at pupil work. Planning for Progress meetings are being further strengthened. These discussions between home and school improve parental engagement whilst focussing on next steps for learning. Where appropriate, intervention is put in place, while working effectively with other agencies and parents to ensure the needs of each child are met.

In the primary classes, standards of attainment have been maintained over the last three years. Most children are achieving national expectations in reading, writing, listening, talking and numeracy. Tarbert continues to develop within the PATHS program supporting positive behaviours and relationship within the school. A larger staff, parent body and partner group by nature increases the breadth of talent and interest that may be available to share within a school setting. This applies both in terms of the wider curriculum and within aspects of the curriculum that may be enhanced by staff individual expertise e.g. PE, language, science, expressive arts teaching.

#### 12.2.3 Experiences - Broadening the Range of Opportunities

Children are offered a range of active, planned experiences which help them develop the knowledge and

understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing both now and in the future.

#### 12.2.4 Environment for Learning

Tarbert Primary School is a suitably-equipped and well supported school, situated in the village of Tarbert. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the primary school. The school has an all- weather pitch adjacent to the school. The pitch is used very well by the school. The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs.

### **12.3 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Skipness Primary School is being reviewed are stated at Section 2 of this report. There is currently no expectation for the pupil numbers to increase at the School. Skipness Primary School is mothballed with no current pupils. Having considered all the alternatives above, the option to close Skipness Primary School and realign the catchment area for Tarbert Primary School to include the former Skipness Primary School catchment area is considered the most reasonable means to address the reasons identified at Section 2 of this report.

#### 12.3.1 Community Impact

The community overwhelmingly supported closure of the school with the suggestion that the building and adjoining grounds could potentially be retained for community use. Within Skipness there is a Village Hall which houses community events. All people who attended the Options Appraisal Meeting strongly stated the school building should be retained for community use and not allowed to fall in to further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the community's access to the premises and the visual impact of the village. It is accepted that a school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, but a vibrant community hub could be an asset to the community. The school premises are situated within walking distance of the village. If the local plans for the building progress, this would have a positive impact on the sustainability of the village. Formal closure of the school would mean that these plans could potentially be progressed by the community.

### 12.3.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Skipness Primary to Tarbert Primary is 12.6 miles via the B8001 and the A83. Travel time is approximately 25 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for almost 3 years. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Skipness community. Pupils will travel on the existing West Coast Motors service bus and eventually all the pupils will travel to Tarbert Primary School. The environmental impact of travel will be minimal, as these arrangements are currently in place due to the mothballing of Skipness Primary School. The closure of Skipness Primary School, in terms of travel, would have a neutral effect on the environment. Due to there being no pupils presently within the Skipness catchment area, there is currently no annual transport cost of taking pupils to Tarbert Primary School and use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would mean there are no future cost implications.

## **12.4 Financial Impact**

The main elements included within a school budget are Teacher employment costs (ie basic salary costs plus related employer's National Insurance and Superannuation contributions plus any relevant individual allowances); Local Government employee costs and an allocation for discretionary expenditure incurred by the school (i.e. educational equipment, materials, staff travel, etc.). Teacher staffing budgets are calculated on an annual basis and within the Primary sector are determined, taking cognisance of the SNCT class size maxima, by the number of classes required to provide for the specific number and age of the pupils in each school. When a school ceases to be operational the Teacher staffing budget is adjusted (at the appropriate time), per entitlement information from Education HR, with the staffing budget resulting in a nil value. As a result of the authority's policy for no Teacher redundancies it is presumed that the staff are deployed elsewhere within the authority and therefore their salary costs still exist with an increase to the receiving school's budget. This is also in line with the national priority of maintaining teacher numbers. This methodology also applies to the school's discretionary budget which again is formula based. The budget of the receiving school, in terms of any pupils being transferred, will have increased. The figures outlined below take account of the fact that the staffing and discretionary budgets have been adjusted to nil.

The annual running costs during mothballing of Skipness Primary School are a total of **£1,644**.

Annual savings generated through closing Skipness Primary School would be **£1,644**

The costs/savings outlined above assumes all revenue expenditure would cease. This includes non-domestic rates, utility costs, insurances, etc. If the school was to be formally closed, this would allow the council to take steps towards selling the school to a third party or local community.

### **12.5 Environmental Impact**

Currently no pupils travel to Tarbert Primary. However this option would have a neutral environmental impact on the current position and would have no impact on the current travel arrangements for staff and pupils. Eventually all pupils will attend Tarbert Primary School, a relatively short journey. Travel is an accepted aspect of rural life.

## **13. CONCLUSION**

Four alternative options have been reviewed in considering the future of Skipness Primary School. For each option, information was collated and consideration was given to:

- Community feedback;
- Pupil numbers;
- Financial Information;
- Assessment of rural factors, including community impact, economic impact and travel arrangements, and
- Educational Benefits.

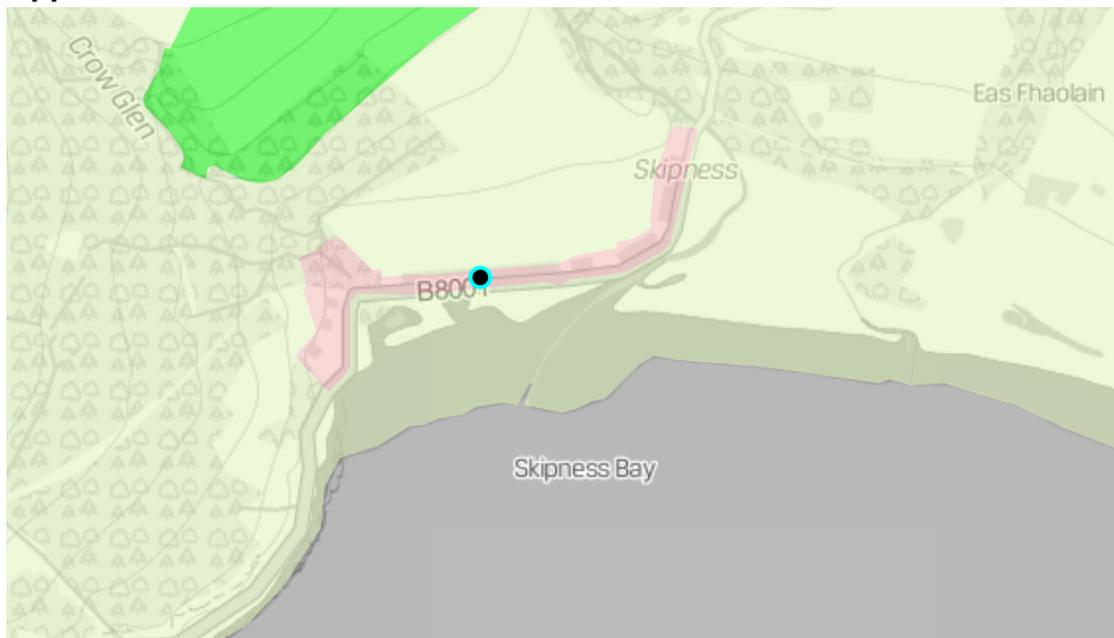
An authority that is contemplating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in Section 12A of the 2010 Act before formulating a proposal.

After consideration of the preliminary requirements, as set out in the Act, and the options, and having regard to the specific reasons identified at Section 2 of this report, closing Skipness Primary School and realigning the catchment area of Tarbert Primary School to include the current catchment area for Skipness Primary School is the most reasonable option in order to address the reasons for the possible proposal.

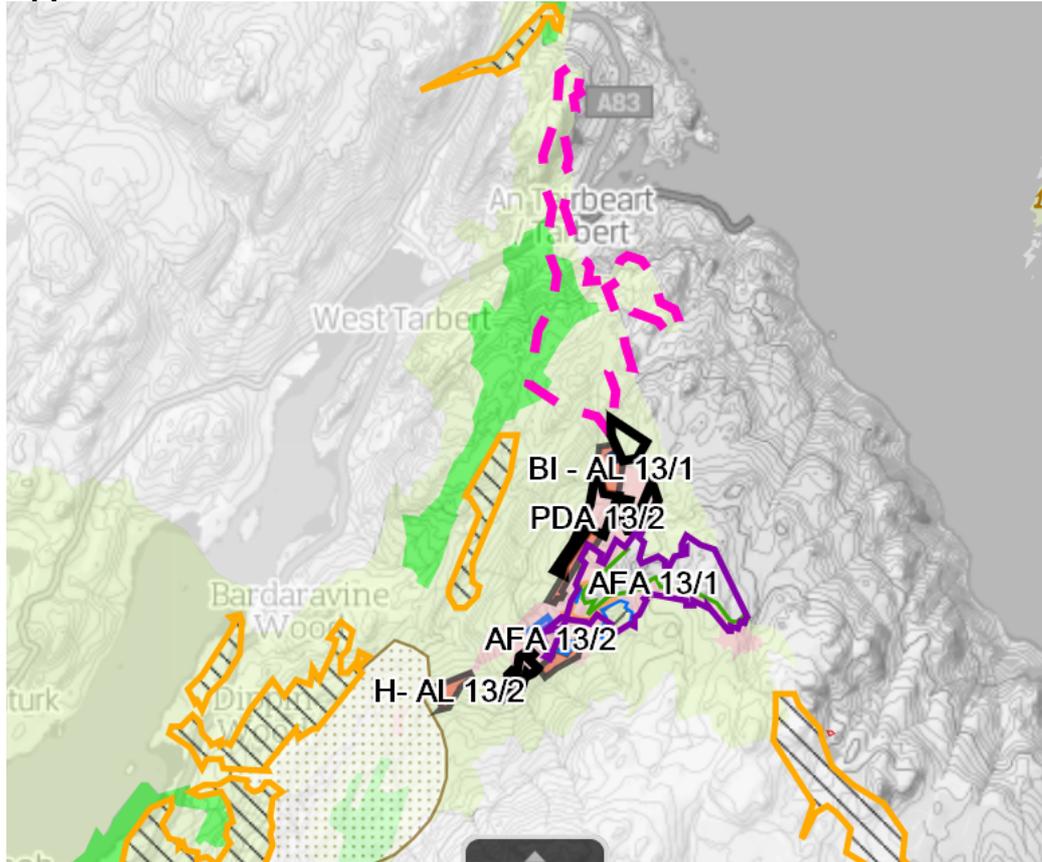
Members are asked to:

- Note the outcome of this consideration of the preliminary requirements; and
- Agree that Officers now formulate a draft proposal that will come back to a future meeting of the Committee for approval by Members which would subsequently trigger the formal consultation process under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

## Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

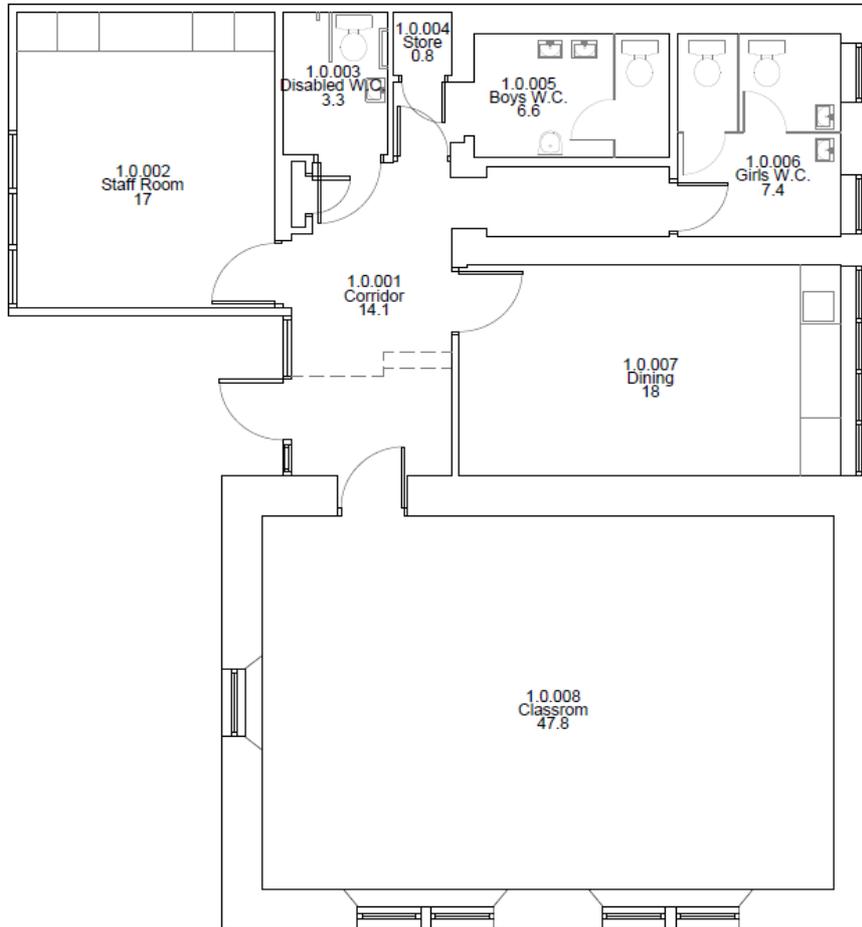


## Appendix 3

### Development Management Zones

-  Countryside Zone
-  Greenbelt
-  Rural Opportunity Area
-  Settlement Zone - Main Town
-  Settlement Zone - Key Settlement
-  Settlement Zone - Key Rural Settlement
-  Settlement Zone - Village / Minor Settlement
-  Very Sensitive Countryside

# Appendix 4



Skipness Primary School Main Building  
Ground Floor

### Notes

Contractor to check all dimensions on site.  
Do not scale from drawing.  
Report any discrepancies and omissions to Customer Services, Argyll and Bute Council without delay and before proceeding with any affected works.  
All Building work is to comply with current Technical Standards and all other relevant statutory regulations.

**DESIGN**  
Unless stated otherwise, the designs shown are subject to detailed survey, investigations, and legal definition, the CDM Regulations, and the comments and / or approval of the various relevant Local Authority Officers, Statutory Undertakers, Fire Officers, Engineers and the like. They are copyright, project specific and confidential and not part to be used or copied in any way without the express prior consent of Customer Services, Argyll and Bute Council.

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Current School GIA on 31.10.13 = 126m<sup>2</sup>

Rev	Date	Description	Drawn By
1	01/10/13	Issue for tender	
<b>Customer Services</b> Property Design Team			
			
Phone: 01546 602127 <a href="http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk">http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk</a>			
<b>Site</b> Skipness Primary School			
<b>Location</b>		<b>Postcode</b>	
Tarbert		PA29 6XT	
<b>Project</b>			
---			
<b>Drawing</b>			
Current Floor Plan			
<b>Site UPRN</b>		<b>Project No.</b>	
PE07109760001		---	
<b>Drawing No.</b>		<b>Revision</b>	
AEL(00)001		---	
<b>Drawn By</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Scale @ A2</b>	
mm	October 2013	1:50	

# Appendix 5

