



Argyll and Bute Council: Education

CONSULTATION REPORT

Report on the outcome of the consultation relating to the proposal to close
Achaleven Primary School

February 2024

This document has been issued by Argyll and Bute Council in regard to a proposal in terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* as amended.

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1. Summary of the Proposal

- 1.1 It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be permanently discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024.
- 1.2 The existing pupils residing within Achaleven Primary School's catchment area will continue to receive their education under existing arrangements. If the proposal goes ahead, future enrolments from the Achaleven Primary School catchment area would generally be educated at Lochnell Primary School.
- 1.3 The delineated catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.

2. Reasons for the Proposal

- 2.1 The above is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal which are:
 - Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for over two years. The school roll is currently zero, and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future.
 - Along with several other rural Councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time the proposal was adopted as a basis for statutory consultation (August 2023), there were 16.29 fte (full time equivalent) vacancies for teachers and Head Teachers in Argyll and Bute.
 - Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for maintenance. The annual cost of the mothballing of the building is currently around £15,866.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 The purpose of this Report is to:
 - Provide a record of the total number of written responses made during the statutory consultation period;
 - Provide a summary of the written responses;
 - Provide a summary of oral representations made at the public meeting held on Wednesday 4th October 2023 at 6.00pm;

- Provide a statement of the Council’s response to those written and oral representations;
- Provide the full text of Education Scotland’s report and a statement of the Council’s response to this report;
- State how the Council reviewed the proposal following the representations received during the statutory consultation period and receipt of the report from Education Scotland;
- Provide details of any omission from, or inaccuracy in, the Proposal Paper and state how the Council acted upon those;
- State how the Council has complied with Sections 11A to 13 of the 2010 Act when reviewing the proposal; and
- Explain the opportunity that may arise to make representations to the Scottish Ministers in connection with Section 15(4) of the 2010 Act.

4. Background

4.1 On 10th June 2021, the Community Services Committee of Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. The Council agreed that in the event there are no registered pupils by the commencement of session 2022/23, the school be considered for formal closure through the statutory process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListMeetings.aspx?CIId=548&Year=0>

4.2 On 25th August 2022 the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation and an Options Appraisal for Achaleven Primary School.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListMeetings.aspx?CIId=548&Year=0>

4.3 A report providing details of the Options Appraisal, which was carried out in accordance with Section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, was tabled at the Community Services Committee held on 9th March 2023, where the Committee agreed to note the outcome of the preliminary requirements and requested that officers formulate a draft closure proposal.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListMeetings.aspx?CIId=548&Year=0>

- 4.4 At the Community Services Committee held on 24th August 2023, Members considered and agreed to adopt the draft proposal as a “relevant proposal” that would proceed to a statutory consultation under the 2010 Act. This statutory consultation opened on 31st August 2023 and concluded on 27th October 2023. A public meeting was also arranged for Wednesday 4th October 2023 at 6.00pm in Achaleven Primary School.
<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=548&Year=0>
- 4.5 Full details of the proposal, reasons for the proposal, the reasonable alternatives to the proposal that were identified, an assessment of the proposal and each of the reasonable alternatives, and an assessment of the educational benefits to the proposal and each of the alternatives are set out in the Proposal Paper, which is attached as **Appendix 1**.

5. Equality and Socio-Economic Impact

- 5.1 The Council as a public authority has a duty under the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011, the Fairer Scotland Duty and the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 to have due regard to their provisions when making strategic or financial decisions. This is done through assessing the potential impact of the decision on equality through Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (EQSEIAs). The full EQSEIA in respect to the proposal to close Achaleven Primary School is attached as **Appendix 2**.
- 5.2 The EQSEIA identifies that there could potentially be negative impacts on mainland rural population, communities of place and interest.
- 5.3 The proposed closure of Achaleven Primary School could adversely affect the availability of local community volunteers. Lochnell Primary School, as a larger school and with a larger catchment area, will afford increased opportunities for volunteers and services to be involved and support the school community.
- 5.4 As the school has been mothballed for 2 years, there would be no impacts on employees, and staff are benefitting from being in a larger school and being able to work collaboratively.
- 5.5 Due regard has been taken in relation to these potential negative impacts and further information relating to impacts and benefits can be found in the EQSEIA (**Appendix 2**) and the Proposal Paper (**Appendix 1**).

6. The Consultation Process

6.1 Following the Council's decision of 24th August 2023, where it agreed to adopt the proposal as a "relevant proposal" in terms of the 2010 Act and issue it as a basis for consultation, the Proposal Paper was made available on the Argyll and Bute Council website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

6.2 A summary of that document was also provided to:

- The Parent Councils of the affected schools
- The parents of the pupils at the affected schools
- Parents of children expected to attend an affected school within 2 years of the date of publication of this Proposal Document
- The pupils, deemed to be of suitable age and maturity to be able to communicate a view on the proposal, at the affected schools
- The teaching and ancillary staff at the affected schools
- The trade unions representatives of the above staff
- Argyll and Bute Councillors – Ward 5: Oban North and Lorn
- Connel Community Council
- Ardchattan Community Council 3
- Dunbeg Community Council
- Community Planning Partnership
- Relevant users of the affected schools
- The Constituency MSP
- List MSPs for the area
- The Constituency MP
- Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland
- Chief Executive, NHS Highland
- Chief Executive Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
- Area Commander, Fire Scotland
- Education Scotland

6.3 Hard copies of the Proposal Paper were also made available for inspection at the following locations:

- Council Headquarters, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT
- Education Offices, Argyll House, Dunoon, Argyll, PA23 8AJ
- Lochnell Primary School, Benderloch, Oban, Argyll, PA37 1QS
- Dunbeg Primary School, Dunbeg, Argyll, PA37 1QF
- Connel Village Hall, Lora Rd, Connel, Argyll PA37 1PA
- Oban Library, 77 Albany Street, Oban PA34 5AL6.4

- 6.4 The document was available in alternative formats or in translated form for readers whose first language is not English.
- 6.5 If members of the public wanted the document in another language or format, or if they required the services of an interpreter, this was made available.
- 6.6 Copies of the Proposal Summary (including a link to the full Proposal Paper) were emailed to notify Education Scotland and all of the relevant consultees (as prescribed by Schedule 2 of the 2010 Act) of the proposal and invited them to make representations as part of the consultation process.
- 6.7 The consultation period ran from 31st August 2023 until the close of business on 27th October 2023 – a continuous period in accordance with Section 6(4) of the 2010 Act.
- 6.8 A public meeting was held at Achaleven Primary School on Wednesday 4th October at 6.00pm. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting and participate was welcome to do so. Advance written notice of this meeting was given to all the “relevant consultees” in terms of the 2010 Act. The meeting was convened by the Education Authority who presented reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There was an opportunity for questions to be asked and comments to be made.
- 6.9 This Consultation Report is the Education Service’s response to the issues raised regarding the proposal during the consultation period. It will be published on the Council’s website for a period of no less than 3 weeks prior to final consideration of the proposal by the Council’s Community Services Committee on 7th March 2024.

7. Pupil Engagement

- 7.1 The proposal to close Achaleven Primary School could have an impact on pupils, parents and the community. Pupils’ views are a significant part of the consultation process. In that regard, pupils that had attended Achaleven Primary School prior to its mothballing and pupils that live in Achaleven Primary School’s catchment area took part in focus groups with officers from the Education Service to share their views on the proposal.
- 7.2 The focus groups consisted of 19 pupils from Lochnell Primary School and 8 pupils from Dunbeg Primary School that live in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area. These meetings were held on 29th September 2023 and 2nd October 2023 respectively. The Dunbeg focus group included

1 pupil who attended Achaleven prior to mothballing. A PowerPoint was presented by an Education Service officer and pupils were given an opportunity to give their views and have these recorded as part of the consultation process.

7.3 The pupils were given information regarding the Council's proposal and asked for their thoughts and ideas through a series of questions.

7.4 Pupils in the focus groups, including the pupil who had previously attended Achaleven said:

- "Having more teachers (*in current school*) is better."
- "Lots of teachers, not just one teaching all day."
- "Some people might like smaller schools."
- "There are lots of people to play with (*in current school*)."

7.5 A summary of the pupil focus group responses is attached as **Appendix 6**.

8. Responses to the Consultation Exercise

8.1 There was one written response received during the consultation period which was emailed to argyllhouwereception@argyll-bute.gov.uk. The written response was submitted by the chair of the Dunbeg Parent Council and asked for consideration to increase the catchment area of Dunbeg instead of Lochnell, or alternatively for pupils to continue to be zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools. The full response can be found in **Appendix 3**. Oral responses to the proposal were gathered at the public meeting held at Achaleven Primary School on Wednesday 4th October. Three representatives from the local community attended along with officers from the Education Authority. Also in attendance and Chairing the meeting was Councillor Yvonne McNeilly, Education Policy Lead. Minutes of the public meeting are attached as **Appendix 4**. One member of the public present had been part of a small group looking to re-open the school. She advised that the numbers in this group have since depleted to such an extent that there was no longer opposition to the closure proposal from them. The other two members of the public were from a local business, and wanted to share their thoughts at the meeting on potential use of the building for both their business, and as an asset for the community should the proposed closure go ahead.

8.2 The written and oral responses to the consultation can be grouped broadly as follows:

- No views were given that Achaleven Primary School should re-open for educational purposes.
- Views were expressed that consideration should be given to an alternative realignment of the Achaleven Primary School catchment area, in that it should be subsumed by Dunbeg Primary School.

8.3 The Education Authority identified and assessed a number of reasonable alternatives to the proposal in its Proposal Paper and as part of the preliminary requirements. A further reasonable alternative to the proposal was submitted as part of the public consultation process for pupils to be able to be zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary School.

9. Education Authority Response to Written/Oral Representations

9.1 Questions raised through the consultation process fell into two main themes: community interest/use of the building and realigning catchment with another school

9.2 Community Interest/Use of the Building

Question: Should the proposal be approved two local business representatives who attended the public meeting expressed a view that they would be interested in using the building for their business and, if there is a desire from the community, to create a hub for community use.

Response: Should the closure of the school be the ultimate outcome the Council in the past have been favourable to community proposals but any decisions wouldn't be made until the future of the school had been decided. If the community were to get in touch the council could commence interim discussions about their plans.

Question: The two local business representatives asked if the proposed closure date could be brought forward should the decision be made to close the school?

Response: As this is a rural school closure, the proposed implementation date of the 31st May 2024, which was set out in advance to all stakeholders within the Proposal Paper, cannot be altered.

9.3 Realigning Catchment to Dunbeg Primary School

Question: Dunbeg Primary School Parent Council Chair through a written consultation response asked would the council consider increasing the catchment area for Dunbeg instead of Lochnell?

Response: The Proposal as consulted on was to close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School. Realignment of the catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School was identified as a reasonable alternative to the proposal, assessed previously as part of the preliminary requirements of the 2010 Act (the Options Appraisal). This alternative is reviewed further in Section 12 below. In addition, the written consultation response further suggested a new reasonable alternative to the proposal, in that pupils could continue to be zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg primary schools. This new alternative to the proposal is also further explored in Section 12, below.

10. Education Scotland Report

- 10.1 In accordance with Section 8(2) of the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was produced by Education Scotland on the educational aspects of the proposal.
- 10.2 In preparing their report, Education Scotland considered all relevant documentation in relation to the proposal. They also met with children from Oban High School who had attended Achaleven Primary School, and pupils from Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools to seek their views, as well as other relevant consultees.
- 10.3 The Education Scotland report is reproduced in full at **Appendix 5**.
- 10.4 Education Scotland's report supports the proposal and is summarised below:
- a) Education Scotland agrees that the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council will result in potential educational benefits for the children in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area. This includes more opportunities for them to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of their peers.
 - b) Education Scotland found that stakeholders were in agreement with the closure proposal but stated that the council should consider the alternative views from the consultation of the school catchment alignment.

- c) Education Scotland notes that should the Council decide to implement the closure proposal, it should continue to engage with the local community including children and young people to consider the future use of the school building.

11. Education Authority Response to Education Scotland Report

11.1 The Education Service welcomes the report from Education Scotland and agrees with its findings.

11.2 The Education Service's responses to the findings contained within the Education Scotland Report are as follows:

a. Education Scotland agrees that the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council will result in potential educational benefits for the children in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area. This includes more opportunities for them to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of their peers.

11.3 The Council agrees that the educational benefits for current and future pupils are clear. Children benefit from enhanced transitions between nursery and Primary 1 and also Primary 7 to S1. Children also benefit from opportunities to work with a wider number of peers and children at other stages, helping to develop social skills. The access to a range of extracurricular activities is also a benefit that children experience at Lochnell Primary School. There are also educational benefits that result from school staff being a part of a larger staff group which enhances opportunities for professional learning and moderation of children's work. Stakeholders have identified the strength of the educational benefits and opportunities for pupils at Lochnell Primary School.

b. Education Scotland found that stakeholders were in agreement with the closure proposal but stated that the council should consider the alternative views from the consultation of the school catchment alignment.

11.4 The views expressed by stakeholders to Education Scotland regarding alternative re-alignments of Achaleven Primary School's catchment area following any closure, were also put forward to the Education Service in the written consultation response that was submitted (see Paragraph 8.1, above, and **Appendix 3**). That written response proposes either closing Achaleven Primary School and realigning its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School (which was one of the reasonable alternatives to the proposal identified and assessed as part of the preliminary requirements).

It also proposes a new reasonable alternative to the proposal of closing Achaleven Primary School and having pupils re-zoned to *either* Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools. The reasonable alternative, and new reasonable alternative which have both been raised in this regard are further reviewed in Section 12 of this Report.

c. Education Scotland notes that should the Council decide to implement the closure proposal, it should continue to engage with the local community including children and young people to consider the future use of the school building.

11.5 The Council is open to engaging with the local community, and any other interested parties, on any plans to develop a sustainable community facility; and would encourage any interested parties to come forward with any proposals in that regard.

12. Rural Schools – Compliance with Section 9(1) of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*

12.1 After the Education Authority received Education Scotland’s report, officers carried out a further review of the proposal following the close of the consultation, having regard (in particular) to:

- Written representations received by the Authority (from any person) during the Consultation period;
- Views of Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary pupils as gathered during the consultation exercise,
- Oral representations made to it (by any person) at the public meeting, and
- Education Scotland’s report.

12.2 The feedback from the Consultation was considered by officers. Data and factual information was checked where required and advice sought from other Council services where necessary. This ensured that the Council met the requirements to review the proposal under Sections 9(1) and 13(5) of the 2010 Act.

12.3 One of the underlying reasons for the Proposal thus far has been, in common with many other Scottish local authorities, the challenge of teacher recruitment in Argyll and Bute. At the time the Proposal was issued as a basis for statutory consultation (August 2023) there were 16.29fte vacancies for teachers and head teachers in Argyll and Bute. Given that this is a fluid figure, it has been reviewed and, as of the end of January 2024, it is now 10.84fte. This update shows that teacher recruitment

continues to be a challenge for the Council and an important factor to consider in relation to the ability to staff all of our schools.

12.4 In addition, officers carried out a further assessment of the proposal and each of the reasonable alternatives to it as set out in the Proposal Paper, having particular regard to the preliminary requirements for rural school closures as set out in Section 12A of the 2010 Act.

12.5 Option to Re-open Achaleven Primary School

12.5.1 The school roll is currently zero, and there have been no enrolments since mothballing. The school roll is not projected to significantly rise in the near future. There would be considerable expenditure in bringing the building up to standard and re-opening. There are also significant challenges in recruiting teaching staff. When taking into consideration the rural school factors, re-opening the school would not in itself increase pupil numbers. Whilst the school re-opening could allow community use of the school building outside school hours, the Connell Village Hall is only a short distance away and is currently used for community events. There was very little community support for re-opening the school as part of the consultation exercise. However, it was indicated that it would be worthwhile to explore the re-purposing of the school building to become a facility for the community. Formal closure of the school would have to take place before any plans to that effect could be progressed. Travel arrangements have been in place since mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the local community. The re-opening of Achaleven Primary School could have a positive impact for those pupils or staff who can cycle or walk or there could be increased car usage by staff needing to travel. But it is noted that the school roll is currently zero and is not predicted to rise to a level which will make the school viable again in the near future. These positive and negative impacts may therefore balance. There are no specific educational benefits from re-opening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching matched to children's needs. Within current arrangements children are benefitting from co-location of nurseries at Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools and the increased opportunities to socialise with a wider peer group. With the continued lack of local support for re-opening Achaleven Primary School, after reviewing the consultation feedback, this is still not considered to be a reasonable option to address the underlying reasons behind the proposal.

12.6 Option to Continue the Mothballing of Achaleven Primary School

12.6.1 Those who responded to the consultation are keen to ensure a future for the building if possible and felt that mothballing the school for a prolonged period could potentially affect the sustainability of the community. The school roll is not projected to significantly rise in the near future. Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021 and whilst mothballed continues to deteriorate. The current annual cost of mothballing the school is £15,866. There is a cost for the Council minibus to transport the pupils to Dunbeg Primary School. There is no additional cost to transport pupils from Achaleven to Lochnell Primary School as West Coast Motors service bus operates on an existing route and transports pupils to the School. When taking into consideration assessment of rural factors the continuing education of pupils at Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools would not change the current impact on the local community, as these arrangements have been in place since mothballing. Pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School are not expected to increase. While mothballed, the school building would continue to deteriorate and would not be available for potential community opportunities such as a community hub. There would be no change to current travel arrangements. All schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching matched to children's needs. Within current arrangements children are benefitting from co-location of nurseries at Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools and the increased opportunities to socialise with a wider peer group. The building's mothballing is not of benefit to the community or the Council. Therefore continued mothballing would still be viewed as not a reasonable option.

12.7 Option to Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School

12.7.1 Community feedback generally supports the closing of Achaleven Primary School with potential for the school to be used as a community asset.

12.7.2 The written response to the consultation suggested closure of the school but re-zoning of its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School, as opposed to Lochnell.

12.7.3 There are no specific educational benefits from re-opening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching matched to children's needs. Both Dunbeg and Achaleven are very remote rural schools. Children from

the Achaleven area who attend Dunbeg Primary School are not moving from a school that is completely different from their home environment. At Dunbeg children benefit from increased opportunities to socialise with a wider peer group. While the current capacity of Dunbeg is 51% there is expected to be a significant rise. The projected increase in roll for Dunbeg Primary School is to be at 90% capacity by 2030. There would be no effect on current travel arrangements for staff and pupils. The existing West Coast Motors service to Lochnell includes no cost to the council compared to the annual cost of providing transport to Dunbeg Primary School. With the school roll at Dunbeg Primary projected to increase annually for the foreseeable future and with continuing costs incurred for transport of pupils from Achaleven to Dunbeg Primary school, the closure of Achaleven Primary School and realignment of the Dunbeg Primary School catchment area to include the current Achaleven Primary School catchment would still be viewed as not a reasonable option.

12.8 Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School (the Proposal)

12.8.1 Community feedback generally supports the closing of Achaleven Primary School with potential for the school to be used as a community asset. Formal closure of the school would mean any plans for community use of the school premises could potentially be progressed. The roll for Achaleven Primary School is currently 0 and is not expected to rise significantly in the future. The current occupancy rate for Lochnell is 80% with this predicted to fall slightly in 2024/25. Travel arrangements have been in place since mothballing and there would be no change to these current arrangements for staff and pupils. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. An existing West Coast Motors bus service means that there would be no additional annual transport costs. There are no specific educational benefits from re-opening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching matched to children's needs. Both Lochnell and Achaleven are very remote rural schools. Children from the Achaleven area who attend Lochnell Primary School are not moving from a school that is completely different from their home environment. At Lochnell children benefit increased opportunities to socialise with a wider peer group. After further assessment of the proposal, the underlying reasons for it, the consultation responses, and careful consideration of the rural school factors, it has been assessed this would still be viewed as the most

reasonable option to address the underlying reasons for the proposal.

12.9 Close Achaleven Primary School and Extend the Catchment Areas of Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools

12.9.1 This was a new reasonable alternative to the proposal raised by the written response submitted to the consultation.

12.9.2 A suggestion was made that if Achaleven Primary School were to close, pupils should continue to be zoned to either Dunbeg or Lochnell Primary Schools.

12.9.3 This new reasonable alternative has therefore been assessed by officers. It would not require any change to current travelling arrangements, although capacities on school transport may have to be monitored over time should this option proceed.

12.9.4 However, in terms of impact on the community, the Education Service consider that splitting the catchment between Dunbeg Primary School and Lochnell Primary School would potentially have the effect of splitting the Connel community. This was viewed as officers as not being beneficial to pupils, families, or the local community. For these reasons, the Education Service are of the position that this would not be a reasonable or viable alternative to the proposal.

12.10 Officers of the Education Authority have listened carefully to the points made at the public meeting and have considered equally carefully the Education Scotland report and the written representations. As set out above, the proposal has been reviewed to consider whether any of the representations led the Council to reconsider any other options as being reasonable alternatives to the proposal.

12.11 The Educational Benefits were reviewed in respect of the Education Scotland report and representations made. There were no factors included in the Education Scotland report or representations made requiring any aspect of the Educational Benefits to be reconsidered. Further consideration was also given to the likely effect on the local community, and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements. Having reviewed the Education Scotland report and feedback from consultees in respect of the proposal and each of the reasonable alternatives, officers concluded that the proposal continues to be the most appropriate response to the underlying reasons for its formulation.

- 12.12 Officers concluded that the educational benefits of the proposal far outweigh any potential disadvantages. Formal closure of the school will allow plans to acquire the building to be progressed by the local community and/or other interested parties, which in turn will increase the availability of the premises to the community and even benefit the sustainability of the community. The proposal will have a neutral impact on travelling arrangements, as these have been in place since the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School in 2021. The overwhelming majority of views gathered as part of this consultation were not in support of the school being re-opened for education provision. Education Scotland's report is also supportive of the Council's proposal being implemented.
- 12.13 Therefore, the Council has had regard to the points made at the public meeting, the written consultation responses and Education Scotland's report. It thereafter carried out a review of the proposal and all the reasonable alternatives and has concluded that the proposal remains the best solution to address the reasons for the proposal as set out at Section 2 of this Report. Implementation of the proposal will allow children to have access to increased learning opportunities, wider experiences and better socialisation through being part of a larger school. If the school were to remain mothballed this would be a continuing drain on the Council's resources. The proposal will assist the Council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. Furthermore, the Council will follow up on working with the local community and/or any other interested parties to explore options for future use of the school premises, should they wish to progress this.

13. Alleged Omissions or Inaccuracies

- 13.1 Section 10(3) of the 2010 Act places a requirement on the Council to provide details of any inaccuracy or omission in the Proposal Paper which has either been identified by the Council or raised by consultees. This provision also requires the Council to provide a statement on the action taken in respect of the inaccuracy or omission, or if no action was taken, to state that fact and why.
- 13.2 In the course of the statutory consultation, there were no areas identified by the respondents, or by the Council, as being inaccurate or omitted from the Proposal Paper.

14. Opportunity to Make Representations to the Scottish Ministers

- 14.1 If the Education Authority makes a closure decision, it shall notify the Scottish Ministers within 6 working days of that decision and publish the fact that the Scottish Ministers have been notified, and that representations can be made to them. The Education Authority would also be required to publish a notice on its website of the decision to implement the proposal and why it has been satisfied that closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for formulating the proposal.
- 14.2 The Scottish Ministers will have a maximum of 8 weeks to call in any closure decision made by the Education Authority in certain circumstances. This 8 week timeframe would consist of an initial 3 weeks from the date of decision, during which representations can be made to the Ministers, and a further 5 weeks for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether to issue a call in notice. During this period the Education Authority will not proceed to implement any closure decision.
- 14.3 If the Scottish Ministers call in a closure proposal, it is referred to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels. The Convener must constitute a School Closure Review Panel within 7 days for determination. The Education Authority may not implement a closure decision in whole or in part until the Panel has made its determination. It will usually issue a decision within 8 weeks of the Panel being constituted.
- 14.4 If the School Closure Review Panel refuses to consent to the closure decision, or following publication of the Consultation Report the Education Authority decides not to implement the closure proposal, the Education Authority cannot publish a further closure proposal in relation to the school for 5 years, unless there is a significant change in the school's circumstances.

15. Conclusion

- 15.1 It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School shall be permanently discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024; and the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to subsume the current catchment area of Lochnell Primary School.
- 15.2 This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal which are:

- Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for over two years. The school roll is currently zero, and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future.
- Along with several other rural Councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. As of the end of January 2024, there are 10.84 vacancies for primary teachers and head teachers in Argyll and Bute.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for maintenance. The annual cost of the mothballing of the building is currently around £15,866.

16. Recommendation

- 16.1 On the basis of the consultation responses received, Education Scotland's report, and having particular regard to the specific factors for rural school closures, it is recommended that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be permanently discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024; and that the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.

APPENDIX 1

Argyll and Bute Council



Education



PROPOSAL DOCUMENT: August 2023

Review of Education Provision

Achaleven Primary School

Proposal for the closure of Achaleven Primary School

SUMMARY PROPOSAL

It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024.

The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.

Reasons for this proposal

This is the best option to address the reasons for the proposals which are;

- Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for two years. The school roll is currently zero, and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future.
- Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time of writing there are 16.29 teacher and head teacher vacancies in Argyll and Bute.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budget for maintenance. The annual cost of the mothballing of the school building is currently around £15,866.

This document has been issued by Argyll and Bute Council in regard to a proposal under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended. This document has been prepared by the Council's Education Service with input from other Council Services.

DISTRIBUTION

A copy of this document is available on the Argyll and Bute Council website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

A summary of this document will be provided to:

- The Parent Councils of the affected schools
- The parents of the pupils at the affected schools
- Parents of children expected to attend an affected school within 2 years of the date of publication of this Proposal Document
- The pupils, deemed to be of suitable age and maturity to be able to communicate a view on the proposal, at the affected schools

- The teaching and ancillary staff at the affected schools
- The trade unions representatives of the above staff
- Argyll and Bute Councillors – Ward 5: Oban North and Lorn
- Connel Community Council
- Ardchattan Community Council
- Dunbeg Community Council
- Community Planning Partnership
- Relevant users of the affected schools
- The Constituency MSP
- List MSPs for the area
- The Constituency MP
- Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland
- Chief Executive, NHS Highland
- Chief Executive Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
- Area Commander, Fire Scotland
- Education Scotland

A copy of this document is also available from:

- Council Headquarters, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT
- Education Offices, Argyll House, Dunoon, Argyll, PA23 8AJ
- Lochnell Primary School, Benderloch, Oban, Argyll, PA37 1QS
- Dunbeg Primary School, Dunbeg, Argyll, PA37 1QF
- Connel Village Hall, Lora Rd, Connel, Argyll PA37 1PA
- Oban Library, 77 Albany Street, Oban PA34 5AL

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If you would like this document in another language or format, or if you require the services of an interpreter, please apply to the Executive Director, Argyll and Bute Council Headquarters, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT.

Jezeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymaO ten dokument w innym języku lub w innym formacie albo jeeli potrzebna jest pomoc Uumacza, to prosimy o kontakt z nami.

本文件可以翻譯為另一語文版本，或製作成另一格式，如有此需要，或需要傳譯員的協助，請與我們聯絡。

Ma tha sibh ag iarraidh an sgrìobhainn seo ann an cànan no riochd eile, no ma tha sibh a' feumachdainn seirbheis eadar, feuch gun leig sibh fios thugainn.

यह दस्तावेज़ यदि आपको किसी अन्य भाषा या अन्य रूप में चाहिये, या आपको आनुवाद-सेवाओं की आवश्यकता हो तो हमसे संपर्क करें

本文件可以翻譯為另一語文版本，或製作成另一格式，如有此需要，或需要傳譯員的協助，請與我們聯絡。

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ, ਜਾਂ ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਸਮਝਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਕਿਸੇ ਇੰਟਰਪ੍ਰੈਟਰ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

یہ دستاویز اگر آپ کو کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہو، یا اگر آپ کو ترجمان کی خدمات چاہئیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کیجئے۔

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 10th June 2021 Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. The Council agreed that in the event there are no registered pupils by the commencement of session 2022/23 the school be considered for formal closure through the statutory process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=548&MId=14218&Ver=4>

- 1.2 On 25th August 2022, the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation and an Options Appraisal for Achaleven Primary School.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=548&MId=14784&Ver=4>

- 1.3 The Community Services Committee received a report on 9th March 2023 providing details of the Options Appraisal for Achaleven Primary School; carried out in accordance with the preliminary requirements set out in Section 12A of the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, as amended. The Committee agreed to note the outcome of this consideration of the preliminary requirements and requested that officers formulate a draft proposal for consideration at the meeting of the Community Services Committee on 24th August 2023 which, if approved, would subsequently trigger the formal consultation process under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=548&MId=15032&Ver=4>

- 1.4 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, introduced 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 certain preliminary requirements which must be satisfied prior to the formulation of a proposal.

- 1.5 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. This may be something that the Community wish to consider as part of or as a consequence of this process. Public bodies including Councils must consider such requests and make a decision within six months of receiving a valid request.
- 1.6 Achaleven Primary School has had zero pupils enrolled since August 2021.
- 1.7 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 the preliminary requirements which were undertaken prior to this proposal being written. A full assessment of the preliminary requirements is set out in the Options Appraisal, which is attached as **Appendix 5**
- 1.8 A new Corporate Plan (2023-2027) was agreed by the Council 29th June 2023. The Plan contains a new set of Council Priorities. The Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan 2023-2027 states its vision of a successful and vibrant Argyll and Bute with a growing population and thriving economy. The area has a rich mix of remote, rural and island communities. The Council will use its strong track record in partnership working, at all levels, to secure the best possible outcomes.

In the Corporate Plan for 2023-2027 through the agreed priorities, the will ensure:

- Children and young people will attain and achieve at all stages. We will improve outcomes for our children and young people.
- Our schools are effective, sustainable learning environments.
- Continued support for all of our children and young people with additional support needs across Argyll and Bute, within our schools and other service areas.
- We will support connections to, from and within Argyll and Bute.
- Recognition of the importance of marine connections to and from our island and mainland communities and our role in maintaining these links.
- We will reduce our carbon emissions.
- We seek to increase availability of all types of housing, including affordable homes.
- We build up and strengthen our communities as attractive, vibrant places to live, work and do business.
- We make assets work now while we plan for and invest in the future.

- We commit to working in partnership wherever we need to as well as calling on others, with responsibility, to take action that is required to safeguard Argyll and Bute's success.

1.9 The Council, as an Education Authority, has 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" which is the Education Vision and Strategy for Argyll and Bute Council.

2 PROPOSAL

2.1 It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be permanently discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024. The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.

Reasons for this proposal

2.2 This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal, which are:

- Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for 2 years. The school roll is currently zero, and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future.
- Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time of writing there are 16.29 fte teacher and head teacher vacancies in Argyll and Bute.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budget for maintenance. The annual cost of the mothballing of the building is currently £15,866.

Additional Considerations

- The Council needs to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all of its services;
- This proposal will bring educational benefits and assist in ensuring that the Education budget is more sustainable into the future. This proposal document contains an Educational Benefits Statement;
- The costs per pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high;

- Schools in the Council area are expensive to maintain and operate. Retaining unnecessary accommodation is a serious drain on the resources of the Council and diverts spending from areas that directly affect the educational attainment of pupils; and
- There is no realistic possibility at present of the Council being able to bring its whole school estate up to a satisfactory condition. The present condition is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the extent of the estate.

3 PRELIMINARY REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1 The Council is required to consider the future of Achaleven Primary School, as it has been mothballed for 2 years. The Council have considered the reasons for making this proposal, and have also considered other viable alternatives, the likely effects on the community and the likely effects of different travelling arrangements as a consequence of this proposal. Financial implications were also considered. Some of these figures have been recalculated since the Options Appraisal was produced.
- 3.2 The Council considered how the implementation of this proposal would impact on the education of the children affected. The Council also considered the impact on the children who currently live in the catchment area but attend other schools, as well as children who may potentially live in the catchment area in the future.
- 3.3 The place of the school in the community was also considered, in terms of the impact this proposal would have on the sustainability of the community itself. Since its mothballing, the school premises has not been used for any meetings or events, as these tend to be held in Connel Village Hall, a short distance (approximately 300 yards) from the school.
- 3.4 Impact on the environment was taken into account during the initial pre-consultation process. This included a consideration of the transport implications if this proposal was to be implemented.
- 3.5 Four options were presented to the local community by the Council for consideration during the pre-consultation phase, as required by section 12A of the 2010 Act.
- 3.6 Of the four options which were considered by the community and the Council; (d) is the option favoured by the Council, as it was considered it most adequately addressed the reasons for the proposal.
 - a) Re-open Achaleven Primary School,
 - b) Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary with pupils zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary School,

- c) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School.
- d) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School (The Proposal).

When considering the above options; the positive educational benefits of Lochnell Primary School alongside the factors of projected low pupil numbers, the challenges in recruiting teaching staff and the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard at Achaleven Primary School; in addition the lack of local support for reopening Achaleven Primary School; option (d) was considered the most appropriate response to the underlying reasons behind consideration of this proposal.

- 3.7 Following from an initial Options Appraisal which was presented to the Council's Community Services Committee on 9th March 2023, it was agreed that the preliminary requirements were satisfied enabling the draft proposal to be formulated, with the option to close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School being identified as the most adequate means of addressing the reasons for the possible proposal.
- 3.8 During the preliminary consultation regarding the future options for Achaleven Primary School, there were a range of viewpoints gathered from parents, young people and members of the community.
- 3.9 The majority of the community 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. The majority of the community felt that it would be disappointing if the building lay empty and became derelict and were keen to explore other options for the building should the school close permanently. Parents of very young children expressed concern that the school may be closed, but agreed this may be the best option when projected numbers were clarified.
- 3.10 Closing the school would have no impact on staff or pupil travel from the current arrangement. There would be no alteration to the current travelling arrangements or environmental impact.

Alternatives to the Proposal

- 3.11 The community engagement process prior to the drafting of this proposal considered the views of members of the community and also considered any other alternatives to the closure of Achaleven Primary School. Full details from the community engagement and the findings from the preliminary requirements, to include the alternative proposals are attached as **Appendix 5**.

- 3.12 In conclusion, after the pre-consultation with the community, the Council feels that the proposal to close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School is the most reasonable means to address the underlying reasons for considering the future of Achaleven Primary School. Further detail is provided in relation to educational benefits, travel, environmental impact, community impact and financial impact below.

4 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024. The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School. (See **Appendix 3.**)
- 4.2 Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for two years. The school condition will deteriorate with limited budgets for maintenance. The school roll is currently zero and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future. The annual cost of the mothballing of the building has increased to £15,866 since the Options Appraisal was produced.
- 4.3 Along with several other rural Councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time of writing there are 16.29 fte teacher and head teacher vacancies in Argyll and Bute.
- 4.4 The Council needs to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all of its services.
- 4.5 This proposal will bring educational benefits and assist in ensuring that the Education budget is more sustainable into the future.
- 4.6 The costs per pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high.
- 4.7 Schools in the Council area are expensive to maintain and operate. Retaining unnecessary accommodation is a serious drain on the resources of the Council and diverts spending from areas that directly affect the educational attainment of pupils.
- 4.8 There is no realistic possibility at present of the Council being able to bring its whole school estate up to a satisfactory condition. The present condition is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the extent of the estate.
- 4.9 As part of the preliminary requirements in the drafting of this proposal, the Council considered four options. The option favoured by the Council is (d), as it was considered it most adequately addressed the reasons for the proposal.

- a) Re-open Achaleven Primary School,
- b) Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary with pupils zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary School,
- c) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School.
- d) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School (The Proposal).

4.10 Having considered these alternatives the Council has made an initial assessment that these are not viable alternatives to the proposal, and will proceed to consult on the proposal to close Achaleven Primary School and extend the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School.

4.11 The Council has undertaken an appraisal on impact if this proposal was to be implemented. This includes an assessment of:

- The school roll and predicted school roll;
- Teacher numbers; and
- The condition of the building.

4.12 The Council has carefully considered and reviewed the steps it has taken to address the underlying reasons for the proposal (as outlined at Section 2.2, above), prior to formulating this Proposal Paper.

4.12.1 In relation to the decline in the school roll, and no material increase being predicted in the forthcoming years, the School was mothballed two years ago as a result of a change to the School's circumstances – i.e. the school roll falling to zero as of August 2021. The Education Authority therefore decided to mothball the school as a temporary measure – in order to monitor the situation and assess whether there was any likelihood of the school roll increasing to the extent that the School became viable again in the near future. The mothballing was subject to review at least annually and the Education Service undertook to review the position should any further school age pupils move into the catchment area and/or if they demonstrated a sufficient level of demand for the School to justify its re-opening. As mentioned above, the School has been mothballed for two years, and its roll is not predicted to rise in the forthcoming years to a level which would make the School suitable for re-opening. As there has been no material change in circumstance evidenced, and having kept the position under review via mothballing for two years, the Education Service are of the view that matters should now move forward in the form of a statutory closure consultation in order to determine the future of Achaleven Primary School. This approach aligns with that suggested by the Statutory Guidance for the 2010 Act, and Paragraphs 63-65 in particular. Further details in relation to the School roll are set out at Section 5 of this Proposal Paper.

4.12.2 In relation to the underlying reason for this proposal in regards to recruitment of teachers, the issues that have been faced by the Education Service regarding the recruitment of teachers to Achaleven Primary School are detailed at Section 6 of this Proposal Paper. Since the School's mothballing, in order to address this particular issue, and prior to formulating this proposal, the Education Service have offered a number of posts across the Authority area on a permanent basis to a locality, rather than to a temporary school, as an attempt to increase the likelihood of attracting a permanent post. The Council has also entered into a strategic housing agreement with social housing partners to support staff with sourcing accommodation (which is a particular pressure in remote areas of Argyll and Bute), as well as offering relocation packages. Furthermore, the Education Service continues to work with UHI Argyll to recruit more local candidates for teacher training. Notwithstanding these efforts, the recruitment of teaching staff within Argyll and Bute remains a considerable challenge, hence why it is still a main underlying reason for this closure proposal.

4.12.3 In relation to the underlying reason for this proposal concerning the condition of the school premises, the school property will continue to deteriorate whilst it remains mothballed. As mentioned at Paragraph 4.12.1, above, there is currently no evidence to suggest that the School will become viable for re-opening in the near future. Whilst the School remains mothballed, it costs the Council £15,866 annually. Accordingly, the Education Service are now seeking approval to proceed with a statutory closure consultation which, if subsequently implemented, will allow the Education Service to use any savings generated to the benefit of the other occupied schools and pupils within the Education Authority's area. It may also allow for any plans for other uses of the School property to be progressed, as it will need to be permanently discontinued as an educational establishment in the first instance. Further information about the condition of the School building and premises can be found at Section 7 of this Proposal Paper

4.13 The council has also undertaken an assessment of likely educational benefits or effects which this proposal may have if implemented on:

- The pupils of any affected school;
- Any other users of the school's facilities;
- Any children who would (in the future but for implementation) be likely to become pupils of the school; and
- The pupils of any other schools in the Council area.

4.14 In addition, the Council has also considered how to minimise or avoid any adverse educational effects that may arise from the implementation of this proposal.

4.15 The Council has also had special regard to the following factors if this proposal was to be implemented, as Achaleven Primary School is classified as a remote rural school.

- Likely effect on the local community to be assessed by reference to:
 - The sustainability of the community; and
 - Availability of the school’s premises and other facilities for use by the school community.
- Likely effect caused by different travelling arrangements by reference to the effect caused by such arrangements on:
 - Environmental impact; and
 - The schools pupils and staff and other users of the schools facilities.

4.16 Finally, the Council has also considered the financial implications of implementation of the proposal and information on this is set out later in this document.

5 SCHOOL ROLL

5.1 The information in relation to the school roll as shown below is drawn from the yearly pupil census, which takes place in September each year. School rolls by their very nature may fluctuate slightly on an ongoing basis due to changes in pupil numbers as a result of pupils moving to and from the catchment area.

The school roll of Achaleven Primary School has seen a steady decline since 2008:

Table 2:	Achaleven	Dunbeg	Lochnell
Capacity	41	174	147
	Roll	Roll	Roll
2008-2009	39	80	92
2009-2010	27	81	87
2010-2011	8	79	92
2011-2012	0	76	96

2012-2013	4	73	101
2013-2014	5	76	112
2014-2015	9	81	109
2015-2016	10	82	114
2016-2017	12	78	124
2017-2018	9	99	130
2018-2019	13	88	124
2019-2020	9	98	114
2020-2021	7	90	112
2021-22	0	88	119
2022-23	0	89	118

Predicted Roll

Table 3:	Achaleven	Dunbeg	Lochnell
Capacity	41	174	147
	Roll	Roll	Roll
2023 -2024	0	125	116
2024 -2025	4	128	114
2025-2026	4	130	122

* A prediction based on information available June 2023.

5.2 In 2022 - 2023 there are 52 school aged children who live in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area and who attend other schools. This includes children within a cross boundary area with Achaleven Primary School and those children who attend the denominational primary school (St Columba's Primary School) in Oban.

5.3 There are currently 16 school aged pupils who live in the Achaleven catchment area who attend Lochnell Primary School and 13 who attend Dunbeg Primary School.

5.4 Whilst there is a slight rise in the predicted school roll for the forthcoming years, the historical trend has been for parents to make placing requests to neighbouring schools. Those in the cross boundary area of Achaleven and Lochnell Primary tend to send their children to Lochnell. This coming school year there are 7 children (as at July 2023) from Achaleven catchment due

to start school in August 23. However, all of those families in the cross boundary area have chosen Lochnell, and the remaining children will attend other local schools by virtue of placing requests.

- 5.5 The school roll is not predicted to rise significantly in the future. The area around Achaleven is a small settlement and is not identified for growth in the Local Development Plan: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/ldp>
- 5.6 There is currently only one residential development within the Achaleven catchment area.

6 TEACHER NUMBERS

- 6.1 Teacher numbers are improving nationally, with a 6.3% increase in the number of teachers nationally from 2016 - 2022. In Argyll and Bute there has been a 3.1% reduction in the fte number of teachers from 2016- 2022
- 6.2 As the school has been mothballed for two years, the issue of recruitment of staff has not improved. At the time of writing there are 16.29 fte teacher and head teacher vacancies in Argyll and Bute. Despite a sustained effort to secure permanent staff, there is no reason to think that staffing would not continue to be a considerable challenge for Achaleven Primary School.
- 6.3 At the current time, if the proposal was to be implemented, there would be no impact on staffing levels at Lochnell Primary School.

7 CONDITION OF THE BUILDING

- 7.1 Argyll and Bute Council's School Estate Management Planning process identified in 2022 that the condition of Achaleven Primary School was satisfactory and graded a B.
- 7.2 The original costs for re-opening the building remain the same as the Option Appraisal (See **Appendix 5**), the running costs of continuing to retain the building whilst mothballed have considerably increased (See **Appendix 4**).
- 7.2 As part of the consultation process the Council would be open to discussion with the community in regard to the future of the building. This might involve the transfer of the property to a recognised community group through the provisions of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 or some other agreed mechanism. This may provide the community with an opportunity to utilise the building as a driver for community benefit and potential regeneration that could also enhance the sustainability of the community.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

8 Assessment of likely educational benefits on pupils

8.1 If this proposal is implemented, the Council believes that there will be considerable educational benefits arising from this. These centre around;

- Learning and teaching;
- Meeting learners needs;
- Broadening the range of opportunities; and
- The environment for learning.

8.2 This statement focusses on Lochnell Primary School, which is the school the majority of pupils from the Achaleven Primary School catchment area currently attend.

8.3 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 Achaleven Primary School as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children. Continued attendance of pupils at other schools allows children to experience a curriculum which is matched to their needs.

8.4 Achaleven and Lochnell Primary Schools are remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Although there are 52 school aged children in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area, children from the Achaleven Primary School catchment area who attend Lochnell Primary School continue to benefit from education in a locality familiar to them, and still relatively close to home.

8.5 The co-location of the Early Learning Centre (ELC) and the primary classes at Lochnell Primary School enables a strong transition process between the ELC and school and includes joint early level learning every week.

9 Learning and Teaching

9.1 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 Lochnell 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.

- 9.2 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 Lochnell 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, take part in team activities and move with their peers to secondary school.
- 9.3 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.
- 9.4 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.
- 9.5 At Lochnell 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. Lochnell Primary School is part of the Oban, Lorne and the Isles 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 Lochnell 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.
- 9.6 Lochnell 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 through events such as sports day and during breaks and lunch when groups of children are together in a social context. This system develops and benefits both the 'buddy' and the 'buddied'. This system works well and benefits the wide range of children in the school.

10 Meeting learners' needs

- 10.1 Through the Getting it Right for Every Child (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.

- 10.2 The school also has planned meetings and discussions with parents. 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. Majority of children are achieving national expectations in reading, writing, listening, talking and numeracy. Health and Wellbeing continues to develop within the Emotion Works programme which supports positive behaviours and relationship within the school.
- 10.3 The staff, parent body and partner groups also bring opportunities for increased collaborative working. 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, STEM, expressive arts teaching.
- 10.4 A 'Respect Me' policy is built into class lessons and permeates the whole school ethos through assemblies and class work on rights and responsibilities. The school has achieved its Bronze Nurture Award and is working towards the Silver Award, it is also working towards Rights Respecting School accreditation

11 Broadening the Range of Opportunities

- 11.1 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.
- 11.2 There is also a strong transition planning process between Lochnell Primary School and Oban High School, which involves increased opportunities for children to participate and to make new connections.
- 11.3 Children are provided with a variety of experiences to develop their sense of responsibility, independence, confidence and enterprising attitude. The school has an active Pupil Council and ECO Group.
- 11.4 Across the school children are engaged with learning and contribute well in lessons. Staff promote positive relationships at all levels and also through the Young Sports Leaders programme, the impact of this being that children enjoy good relationships with their peers, young leaders feel confident and entrusted to take these developments forward.

12 Environment for Learning

- 12.1 Lochnell Primary School is a suitably-equipped and well supported school, situated in Lochnell. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the Lochnell Primary School. The school has an all-weather pitch adjacent to the school, which is well utilised. The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs.
- 12.2 Any mitigating effects around the adverse weather and transport issues are outweighed by the benefits of this proposal.
- 12.3 In summary, there are a range of educational benefits for pupils if this proposal was to be implemented, as summarised in the paragraphs above. There are benefits for the development of social and emotional skills, as well as the educational benefits resultant from access to a more diverse curriculum. The learning environment in Lochnell Primary School also offers children the opportunity to participate in a wider range of active learning strategies.

13 Assessment of likely educational benefits on other users of the school's facilities

Implications for staff

- 13.1 If this proposal is implemented, there will be no new implications for teaching and ancillary staff in Lochnell Primary School.
- 13.2 If this proposal is implemented, the Council does not envisage any adverse effects from the proposal in respect of staffing. Should issues arise however, these will be mitigated through the Council Educational Management Team support structure.

Early Learning Centre Users – Pre Five Children

- 13.3 The co-location for the Early Learning Centre (ELC) and the primary classes at Lochnell Primary School enables a strong transition process between the ELC and the school and includes joint early level learning every week.

14 Assessment of likely educational benefits on any children who would (in the future but for implementation) be likely to become pupils of the school.

Existing and future pupils

- 14.1 Children who may live in this catchment area in the future will benefit from the broad range of educational opportunities which are presented through this proposal, as detailed above.
- 14.2 There would be positive educational benefits associated with this proposal. The management arrangements of the school would be strengthened and there would be opportunities for increasing the range of the curriculum and increasing the use of active pedagogies.
- 14.3 The proposal could increase the roll of Lochnell Primary School and would thus extend the peer group for all pupils, present and future. The larger school should be able to support a wider range of social and extra-curricular activities.
- 14.4 Pupils who would otherwise have attended Achaleven Primary School, would benefit from daily interaction in a larger peer group and from improved educational arrangements as described above. Pupils in the combined school will have more shared experiences and opportunity for friendships. This will enhance their confidence and make the transition to secondary easier. Larger year groups make the provision of specialist services more viable and provide enhanced opportunities for school trips. Lochnell Primary School meets all the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

15 Assessment of likely educational benefits on the pupils of any other schools in the Council area

- 15.1 The current mothballing of the school has had an indirect effect on other pupils in Argyll and Bute. The reduction in the running costs for the school means that this is a saving to the Council, which is not taken from elsewhere. If Achaleven Primary School was to close, the current mothballing costs being incurred would be re-directed and therefore indirectly benefit other school pupils in Argyll and Bute.
- 15.2 There are no other significant impacts from this proposal on other pupils in the authority or who attend other schools, in either a positive or a negative way.

Placing requests

- 15.3 This proposal will not affect the right of parents to request that their child attend a school of their choice rather than the designated school in whose catchment area the family lives as provided by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

16 Consideration of how to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the implementation of this proposal

- 16.1 The main adverse effect from this proposal would be the length of the journey to school for children who live in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area. However, children who live in this catchment area and attend Lochnell Primary School make this journey, and families in the area engaged with thus far do not feel this is a major consideration. Funded school transport would also continue to be provided for pupils should this proposal be implemented.

17 Summary of educational benefits statement

- 17.1 Educational benefits of this proposal, such as the ability for children to participate in a broad range of experiences, the development of the strategic leadership of the head teacher in taking forward improvements in learning and teaching, and the ability to meet the educational, social and emotional needs of the children are significant benefits to this proposal. During the pre-consultation phase, these benefits were explored in detail and details from the community engagement and the findings from the preliminary requirements, to include the alternative proposals and the authority's assessment of other likely effects of the proposal and the reasons for that assessment are attached as **Appendix 5** Options Appraisal.
- 17.2 Whilst the positive educational benefits are numerous, there is one negative aspect identified which arises from the children attending Lochnell Primary School. This negative aspect is principally around the fact that children have to travel by either bus or car to school. However it is considered that the positive aspects of this proposal outweigh the negative aspect of some travelling for children.

18 FACTORS FOR RURAL SCHOOL CLOSURES

- 18.1 The Council has had special regard to the following factors in relation to this proposal, as Achaleven Primary School is classified as a remote rural school:

The likely effect on the local community if this proposal is implemented

- 18.2 The Council has made an assessment on the sustainability of the community should this proposal be implemented and considers that this may have a positive impact.

- 18.3 The Scottish Government focuses on four key areas of importance to rural communities;
- a strong and diverse rural economy, harnessing traditional strengths and with an appetite for change,
 - thriving rural communities where everyone can enjoy a decent quality of life, where the young are not forced to leave their communities to get on and where the vulnerable are no longer excluded,
 - strong, community focused public services that are accessible, of the highest possible quality and with the greatest possible choice,
 - a rural Scotland whose natural and cultural heritage flourishes in all its diversity
- 18.4 In rural communities, the challenges and opportunities are largely defined by the local area and can often best be met by a bottom-up, community-led response. Strong community leadership is vital to articulating local priorities and driving forward change and growth.
- 18.5 There is the potential if this proposal is implemented to capitalise on the existing will and drive in this community, with opportunities for local leaders to enable them to organise, motivate and inspire their neighbours. The opportunity for the local community to acquire this building would have a positive impact on the sustainability for the village.
- 18.6 Research¹ has shown that when communities feel empowered, there is:
- greater participation in local democracy;
 - increased confidence and skills among local people;
 - more people volunteering in their communities; and
 - greater satisfaction with quality of life in the neighbourhood.
- 18.7 The majority of people who attended the preliminary engagement event stated that they would be in favour of preliminary work to investigate whether the school building could be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the visual impact of the village.
- 18.8 It is considered that formal closure of this school could have a positive impact on the wider community, and might have potential to lead to an increase in other users of the facility, which may lead to an improvement in economic growth.

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/>

- 18.9 Indeed, the school closure may help to empower the local community should the community wish to undertake an asset transfer process for the building. This could have a positive impact on community sustainability. Formal closure would mean that these plans could potentially be progressed by the community, some of whom are already contemplating ideas for future uses for the building. This may enhance community life by giving a community enterprise focus.

On the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community

- 18.10 During the pre-consultation phase, almost all members of the community supported closure of the school with the suggestion that the building and adjoining grounds could potentially be retained for community use. As previously stated, Connel Village Hall is situated approximately 300 yards from Achaleven Primary School and is used for village events. All people who attended the pre-consultation meeting felt that 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 aesthetic of the community.
- 18.11 It is accepted that a school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, but a community hub could be an asset to the community. If any of the local community's plans for the building were to progress, this could have a positive impact on the sustainability of the community and in particular the availability of the school's premises and other facilities for use by the community. Formal closure of the school would mean that these plans could potentially be progressed by the community.

The likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements

- 18.12 The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and the A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes. Travel arrangements have been in place for 2 years since the school was mothballed. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community.
- 18.13 Implementation of the proposal would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School, in terms of current travel arrangements would have a neutral effect. There is no current annual transport cost for pupils to travel to Lochnell Primary School as it is part of an existing West Coast Motors service bus route, and therefore would not incur additional costs in the immediate future.
- 18.14 It is anticipated that the effect on the travel arrangements of staff and other users of the facility would not differ materially from that of the pupils.

Environmental impact

- 18.15 Currently pupils travel to Lochnell Primary School from the Achaleven Primary School catchment area, and there is a pre-existing West Coast Motors service bus. Therefore, implementation of the proposal would have a neutral environmental impact on the current position, and would have no environmental impact on the current travel arrangements for staff.
- 18.6 If this proposal was to be implemented there would be little or no further impact on the natural environment.

19 FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 19.1 The full breakdown of the financial analysis is detailed in **Appendix 4**. This information gives details on the estimated cost if Achaleven Primary School was still to be an occupied and operational establishment. However, as Achaleven Primary School is currently mothballed, the cost for the mothballing is now estimated to be £15,866 per year. Should the school be reopened, occupied and operational, the running costs per year are estimated at £165,867 with the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is £25,465. These latter two costs have not changed significantly since the Options Appraisal (**Appendix 5**) was produced.
- 19.2 Column 2 of Table 1 at **Appendix 4** shows the projected annual running costs of Achaleven whilst Column 3 shows the additional impact on Lochnell Primary as the receiving school. The annual recurring savings (or costs) are shown in Column 4.
- 19.3 The main elements included within a school budget are teacher employment costs (i.e. 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.
- 19.4 In line with the national priority of maintaining teacher numbers, the Education Service operates on the basis that supernumerary teachers are

redeployed and therefore their salary costs still exist with an increase to the receiving school's budget. Some of the costs noted in column 3 of Table 1 will not directly impact on Lochnell Primary School but they will be a cost to the Authority as a whole, for example the costs of maintaining the teachers employed in Achaleven Primary School.

- 19.5 There are currently no annual transport costs for pupils to attend Lochnell Primary School.
- 19.6 Table 2 contains the notional 30 year lifecycle costs that would arise based on the GIA of the various schools irrespective of the number of pupils accommodated. Lifecycle costs are representative of the cost needed to keep the building in a good state of repair. The cost over the next thirty years therefore to maintain Achaleven Primary School is £327,885 and for Lochnell Primary School this is £1,060,969.
- 19.7 Table 3 contains the annual running costs during mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. This estimate has increased to £15,866 per year. 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.
- 19.8 The transfer of pupils from Achaleven to Lochnell Primary School would impact on the council's Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) allocation for Achaleven Primary School Teaching Staff as there would be a reduction in the Percentage of Primary Pupils in Small Schools. This reduction is estimated at £15,798. However Argyll and Bute Council is supported through the floor mechanism so would not see a reduction in their overall funding.

20 EQUALITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

- 20.1 The Council as a public authority has a duty under the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011, the Fairer Scotland Duty (Part one of the Equality Act) and the Islands (Scotland) Act (2018) to have due regard to their provisions when making strategic financial decisions. This is done through assessing the potential impact of the decision on equality through Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessments (EQSEIAs).
- 20.2 The Council will undertake the process of assessment during the consultation process in respect of this proposal to ensure that due regard is given to such matters in the decision making process.

21 CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

- 21.1 Prior to formulating a rural school closure proposal under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* (the 2010 Act), as amended, the

Education Authority must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in Section 12A of the 2010 Act. The Authority has previously identified its reasons for formulating a possible proposal, considered whether there were any reasonable alternatives to the possible proposal as a response to those reasons, and assessed each of the options in accordance with Section 12A(2)(c) of the 2010 Act. After considering a paper addressing these preliminary requirements, the Education Authority decided on 9th March 2023 that, having specific regard to the reasons for formulating a prospective closure proposal, the option to close Achaleven Primary School and redraw its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School is the most appropriate response to the specific reasons for the potential proposal.

21.2 This document was considered by the Council as Education Authority on 24th August 2023 when it was agreed that it should be adopted as a relevant proposal and issued as a basis for consultation. No decision will be taken by the Council on the proposal contained in this paper until after the end of the consultation period. The Council will then receive a report on the consultation and will reach a view on the proposal.

21.3 A summary of this document will be issued free of charge to all of the consultees listed on page 2 of this document and it will also be published on the Council's website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

21.4 As part of a consultation process, the Education Authority must publish the proposal paper, advertise it and notify Education Scotland and all of the relevant consultees as prescribed by Schedule 2 of the 2010 Act, inviting them to make representations on the proposal. The consultation period will be from 31st August 2023 until the close of business on 27th October 2023 which lasts for a minimum of 6 weeks and includes at least 30 school days.

21.5 A public meeting will be held at Achaleven Primary School on Wednesday 4th October 2023 at 6.00pm. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting and participate is welcome to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Education Authority and the Education Authority will present reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There will be an opportunity for questions to be asked and comments to be made. A note will be taken so that comments can later be summarised and considered. However, the Education Authority will also consider written responses which should be sent to Education Services, School Consultations, Argyll & Bute Council, Argyll House, Dunoon, Argyll, PA23 8AJ and should be received no later than 5.00pm on 27th October 2023.

21.6 Written representations may be made on the proposal and the alternatives to the proposal. Written representations may also suggest other alternatives to the proposal.

21.7 Following the close of the consultation, the Education Authority will provide Education Scotland with copies of the written representations submitted, a

summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting and any other relevant documentation. This will allow Education Scotland to prepare a report on the proposal within a period of 3 weeks.

- 21.8 After receiving Education Scotland's report, the Education Authority will then prepare and publish a Consultation Report in accordance with Sections 9, 10 and 13 of the 2010 Act. The Education Authority will thereafter make its final decision on whether to implement the proposal. The decision will be made a minimum of 3 weeks after publication of the Consultation Report. If the Education Authority makes a closure decision, it shall notify the Scottish Ministers within 6 working days of that decision and publish the fact that the Scottish Ministers have been notified, and that representations can be made to them. The Education Authority would also be required to publish a notice on its website of the decision to implement the proposal and why it has been satisfied that closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for formulating the proposal.
- 21.9 The Scottish Ministers will have a maximum of 8 weeks to call in any closure decision made by the Education Authority in certain circumstances. This 8 week timeframe would consist of an initial 3 weeks from the date of decision, during which representations can be made to the ministers, and a further 5 weeks for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether to issue a call in notice. During this period the Education Authority will not proceed to implement any closure decision.
- 21.10 If the Scottish Ministers call in a closure proposal, it is referred to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels. The Convener must constitute a School Closure Review Panel within 7 days for determination. The Education Authority may not implement a closure decision in whole or in part until the Panel has made its determination. It will usually issue a decision within 8 weeks of the Panel being constituted.
- 21.11 If the School Closure Review Panel refuses to consent to the closure decision, or following publication of the Consultation Report the Education Authority decides not to implement the closure proposal, the Education Authority cannot publish a further closure proposal in relation to the school for 5 years, unless there is a significant change in the school's circumstances.

22 CONCLUSION

- 22.1 It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024. The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.
- 22.2 It has been assessed that the proposal is the most appropriate means of addressing the underlying reasons for formulating it, which are:

- Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for two years. The school roll is currently zero, and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future.
- Along with several other rural Councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time of writing there are 16.29 fte teacher and head teacher vacancies in Argyll and Bute.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for maintenance. The annual cost of the mothballing of the building is currently £15,866.

Other Considerations

- The Council needs to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all of its services.
- This proposal will bring educational benefits to all present and future users of the affected schools and assist in ensuring that the Education budget is more sustainable into the future;
- The costs per pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high;
- Schools in the Council area are expensive to maintain and operate;
- Retaining unnessecary accomodation is a serious drain on the resources of the Council and diverts spending from areas that directly affect the educational attainment of pupils;
- There is no realistic possibility at present of the Council being able to bring its whole school estate up to a satisfactory condition. The present condition is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the extent of the estate.

DOUGLAS HENDRY

Executive Director with responsibility for Education

Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

Policy Lead for Education

For further information, contact:

Wendy Brownlie

Head of Education: Performance and Improvement

Wendy.Brownlie@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Rachel Binnie

Education Manager (Acting)

Rachel.Binnie@argyll-bute.gov.uk

9th August 2023

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Consultation Letter

Appendix 2 - Response form

Appendix 3 - Maps

Appendix 4 - Financial template

Appendix 5 - Options Appraisal



Executive Director: Douglas Hendry

Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA318RT

Telephone: 01631 700045

Fax:

Our Ref:

Ref:

e-mail: Rachel.Binnie@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Council Website: www.argyll-bute.gov.uk

Achaleven Primary School

Dear Consultee,

Review of Education Provision

Notice and Summary of Proposal for closing Achaleven Primary School Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010

Background

Argyll and Bute Council, through its Education Service, aims to realise ambition, excellence and equity for all.

The Council is consulting on a proposal to close Achaleven Primary School. This notice provides a summary of a proposal that you may have an interest in or are required to be notified of, giving you key information about the proposal.

The Council is conducting a public consultation process. This will commence on 31st August 2023 and will conclude on 27th October 2023. This is the period within which you will be able to make written representations to the Council in respect of the proposal. If you wish your view to be taken account of in the consultation exercise you must submit your written representation within this period. This notice and summary provides further information on where a full copy of the proposal may be obtained or referenced and also advises on how you can make written representations to the Council.

The Council will hold a meeting where officers will be able to provide information on the proposal. The details of the public meeting are contained in this notice and summary.

It is important that everyone we are consulting tells us what they think of the proposal. Please read this notice and summary and then consider the contents of the proposal document. You can then tell us what you think of the proposal by making written representation and/or by attending the public meeting. This notice and summary tell you how to do that.

The Proposal

It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024. The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.

Reasons for this proposal

This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposals which are;

- Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for two years. The school roll is currently zero, and is not predicted to rise significantly in the near future.
- Along with several other rural Councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time of writing there are 16.29 fte teacher and head teacher vacancies in Argyll and Bute.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for maintenance.

The Council's education strategy - Our Children Their Future

Together we will realise ambition, excellence and equality for all.

- Raise educational attainment and achievement for all,
- Use performance information to secure improvement for children and young people,
- Ensure children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed,
- Equip young people to secure and sustain positive destinations and achieve success in life,
- Ensure high quality partnership working and community engagement,
- Strengthen leadership at all levels.

Alternatives to the Proposal

The following alternatives to the proposal were considered at the preliminary pre-consultation stage of this process;

- a) Re-open Achaleven Primary School,
- b) Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary with the pupils zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools,
- c) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School,
- d) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School, (the Proposal).

Written representations may be made on those alternatives as well as on the proposal.

Written representations on the proposal may suggest other alternatives to the proposal.

What will we do?

We will consult with people by:

- Providing a notice of the consultation and a summary of the proposal to the relevant consultees **this is that notice and summary**
- Placing an advert in the local press
- Putting information on our website <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>
- Holding a public meeting to explain the proposal
- Ask parents, carers, children, young people, teachers, support staff and others to tell us what they think of the proposals.

What to do now?

- Please read the full proposal document
- Please attend the Public Meeting which will be held on Wednesday 4th October 2023 at 6.00pm in Achaleven Primary School.
- Let us know what you think by:

Letter to: Education Services
School Consultations
Argyll & Bute Council
Argyll House
Alexandra Parade
Dunoon
PA23 8AJ

Returning the attached response sheet by post or by;

Email to: argyllhousereception@argyll-bute.gov.uk

What next?

Whilst the Council is engaging in a consultation process in relation to this proposal that does not mean that the proposal will go ahead. It does mean that the Council is engaging in a consultation process to seek your views on the proposal.

All the points raised during the consultation will be carefully considered and Elected Members will then decide if the plan should go ahead.

If the suggestion goes ahead, any children from Achaleven Primary School catchment area would be educated at Lochnell Primary School. Children already attending Dunbeg Primary School would be able to continue at this school.

Please note that this summary document is for convenience only. Full details of the consultation can be obtained from:

- Council Headquarters, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT
- Education Offices, Argyll House, Dunoon, Argyll, PA23 8AJ
- Lochnell Primary School, Benderloch, Oban, Argyll, PA37 1QS
- Dunbeg Primary School, Dunbeg, Argyll, PA37 1QF
- Connel Village Hall, Lora Rd, Connel, Argyll PA37 1PA
- Oban Library, 77 Albany Street, Oban PA34 5AL

It is also available electronically via our website:

- <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

Yours faithfully,

Douglas Hendry
Executive Director with responsibility for Education



**Argyll and Bute Council
Education**

RESPONSE FORM

I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Elected Members and Council Officers of Argyll and Bute Council.

<u>Proposal</u>	
It is proposed that: Education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31 st May 2024. The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.	
This part of the form must be completed for a valid response:	
Name: (please print)	Address:
	Post Code:
I agree/do not agree (delete which does not apply) that my response can be made publicly available	
Signature:	Date:

YOUR INTEREST: (please tick)

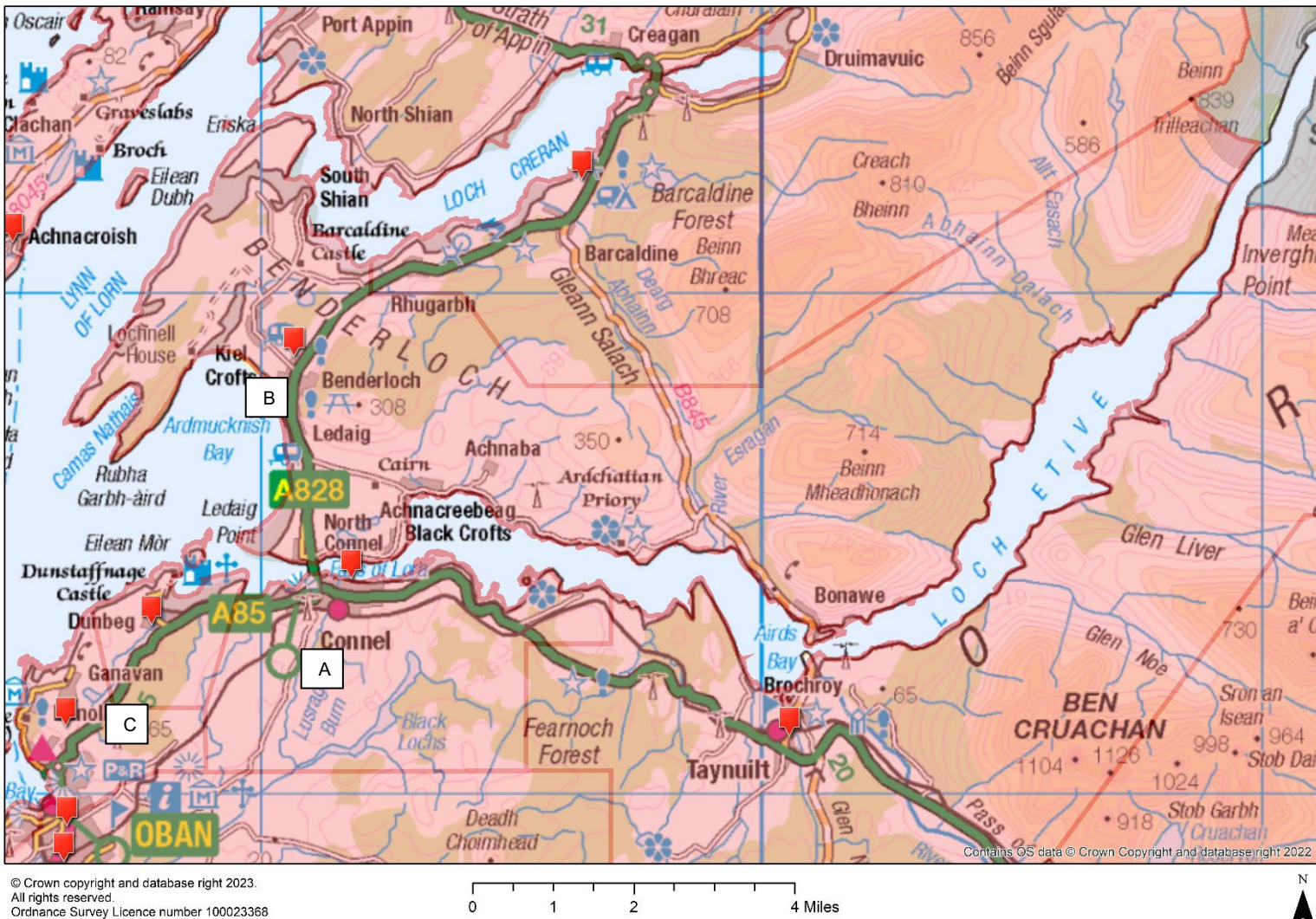
Parent <input type="checkbox"/>	Child / Young Person <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Other * <input type="checkbox"/>
Elected Member / MSP / MP <input type="checkbox"/>		Member of Community Council <input type="checkbox"/>	
*Other: (please specify)			

Please state your views on the proposal (continue overleaf if necessary)

APPENDIX 3 - MAPS

MAP OF CURRENT PRIMARY SCHOOL CATCHMENT AREA

The Map below shows the adjoining catchment areas of Achaleven and Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools:



- A – Achalaven Primary School**
- B- Lochnell Primary School**
- C – Dunbeg Primary School**

APPENDIX 4 – FINANCIAL TEMPLATE

Table 1²

Name of School	Projected annual costs for full financial year 2023/24	Additional financial impact on receiving school Lochnell Primary School	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)
Achaleven Primary			
School costs			
<i>Employee costs -</i>			
teaching staff	106,927		106,927
support staff	23,355		23,355
teaching staff training (CPD etc.)			0
support staff training			0
Supply costs	3,030		3,030
<i>Building costs:</i>			
property insurance	1,948		1,948
non domestic rates	605		605
water & sewerage charges	142		142
energy costs	13,478		13,478
cleaning (contract or in-house)	549		549
building repair & maintenance	2,650		2,650
grounds maintenance	211		211
facilities management costs	0		0
revenue costs arising from capital			0
other - refuse collection; telephones	1,480		1,480
<i>School operational costs:</i>			
learning materials	2,911	44	2,867
catering (contract or in-house)	9,055	361	8,694
SQA costs			0
other school operational costs (e.g. licences)	544		544
<i>Transport costs:</i>			

² These figures have been calculated based on Achaleven Primary school roll the last full year prior to mothballing.

home to school			0
other pupil transport costs	0	0	0
staff travel			0
SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	166,884	405	166,479

Income:			
Sale of meals	-1,017	-291	-726
Lets			0
External care provider			0
Other			0
SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	-1,017	-291	-726
TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	165,868	114	165,754

UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	23,695	14	20,719
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Table 2

Capital costs	School proposed for closure	Receiving school
	Achaleven Primary	Lochnell Primary
Capital Life Cycle cost	352,885	1,060,969
Third party contributions to capital costs		

Table 3

Annual Property costs incurred (moth-balling) until disposal	
property insurance	1,948
non domestic rates	605
water & sewerage charges	142
energy costs	7,412
cleaning (contract or in-house)	0
security costs	0
building repair & maintenance	1,950
grounds maintenance	211
facilities management costs	3,422
other	177

TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	15,866
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Table 4

Non-recurring revenue costs	
	£3,800
TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS	

Table 5

Impact on GAE - note 5	
<p>The Primary Indicator determining the GAE allocation for Primary School Teaching Staff is based on the number of primary school pupils with the Secondary Indicator being the percentage of pupils in small schools (roll < 70 pupils averaged over 2 years). The additional pupils from Achaleven will maintain the rolls of both Dunbeg and Lochnell above the small school threshold. There will be a loss of small school GAE for those pupils attending Achaleven equating to approximately £16k.</p> <p>Argyll and Bute Council, however, is supported by the floor mechanism therefore any calculated reduction in GAE would not have an actual impact on the overall GAE allocation.</p>	15,798
GAE IMPACT	15,798



EDUCATION

OPTIONS APPRAISAL

ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 10th June 2021, Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. The Council agreed that in the event that there are no registered pupils by the commencement of session 2022/23 the school be considered for formal closure through the statutory process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=149205>

On 25th August 2022, the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation and an options appraisal, for Achaleven 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.argyllbute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/g14780/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2025-Aug-2022%2010.00%20Community%20Services%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

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.

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

On 25th August 2022, the 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 Achaleven 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 all of the reasonable alternatives) 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. Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021. There were no pupils registered at the school for session 2021/22 and the roll was 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 January 2023 there were 15.9 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 Achaleven 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 Achaleven and the Local Area - the Achaleven Primary School Setting

Achaleven Primary School is situated in the village of Connel, 5 miles north of Oban. Connel is a small and picturesque village situated on the southern shore of Loch Etive and sits at the end of Connel Bridge, a striking cantilever bridge which spans the sea-mouth of the Loch and was built in 1903 to take the railway line to Fort William. Today it supports the main A828 into Benderloch. Achaleven Primary School sits within grounds between the A85 and Loch Etive.

3.4 The School within the Community

Achaleven Primary School was at one time, active within the community. The pupils invited the community to attend events during the year. However, as the school roll diminished, attendance at events decreased. Whilst being mothballed, the school is not used for any meetings or events, as these tend to be held in Connel Village Hall, a short distance (330 yards) from the school.

3.5 Previous Mothballing and Re-Opening

In April 2011, two papers proposing the amalgamation of Achaleven Primary School with either Dunbeg Primary School or Lochnell Primary School were taken to a special meeting of Argyll and Bute Council. This resulted from the fact that Achaleven Primary School had suffered a decrease of 52 pupils in its roll over the period (2005 – 2011), this was a decline of 83% in the occupancy rate over the same period and the projected roll for 2011/12 was 8 pupils. Following this, Achaleven Primary School was mothballed from June 2011 to August 2012. Achaleven Primary School re-opened with four Primary 1 pupils in August 2012, as a result of the Education Authority determining that the school had become viable again, following a review of the mothballing.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=257&MID=4611>

3.6 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 Achaleven area showing the changing population from census 2001 to census 2011:

Table 1: Population Information

Achaleven Area Census			
2001		2011	
Total Resident Population	135	Total Resident Population	129
% under 16	17.77	% under 16	21.7
% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	54.81	% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	62.0
% pensionable age and over	27.41	% pensionable age and over	16.2

It is recognised that the census area and the catchment area of Achaleven Primary School differ slightly.

3.7 Development and House Building

The current Local Development Plan (LDP2) was adopted in 2019. This sets out planning and development proposals for the next 10 years from 2020 and a vision for 20 years. 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 Achaleven/Connel.

Appendix 2 provides the key for Local Development Plans.

3.8 Achaleven Primary School

Achaleven Primary School, in Connel, is a non-denominational school situated on the main A85 Glasgow to Oban road, by the Connel Bridge. The school serves the village of Connel and its surrounding area from Achnacloich in the east to Dunstaffnage House in the west. The main accommodation, which is over 100 years old, contains two classrooms, toilets, staffroom, office, two resource storage areas, and display areas. There is a detached annexe, which is used as a third classroom and a dining room where School meals are served. Pupils have access to either a grass or a tarmac play area.

Appendix 3 shows the Achaleven Primary School Floor Plan.

Achaleven Primary School is 2.8 miles from Dunbeg Primary School and 3.6 miles from Lochnell Primary School.

The Scottish Government's Rural School List (October 2021) classifies Achaleven 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. Achaleven Primary is one of 21 primary schools associated with Oban High School.

3.9 Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools

Following the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School, parents/carers have the choice to send their children to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools.

Appendix 3 shows the Achaleven Primary Floor Plan

Appendix 4 shows the Lochnell Primary and ELC Floor Plan Appendix

5 shows the Dunbeg Primary and ELC Floor Plan

Lochnell Primary School is a non-denominational and co-educational school situated in the village of Benderloch on the main Oban to Fort William road. The building is single storey and was opened in 1992. The teaching bays in the original building are semi open plan. The new extension teaching bays are open plan. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the primary school. Lochnell Primary School has capacity for 147 pupils.

A joint school and community project was completed to provide and maintain an all-weather pitch adjacent to the school. The pitch is used very well by the school every day. The community have access to the pitch out-with school times and the public can book it at the local garage.

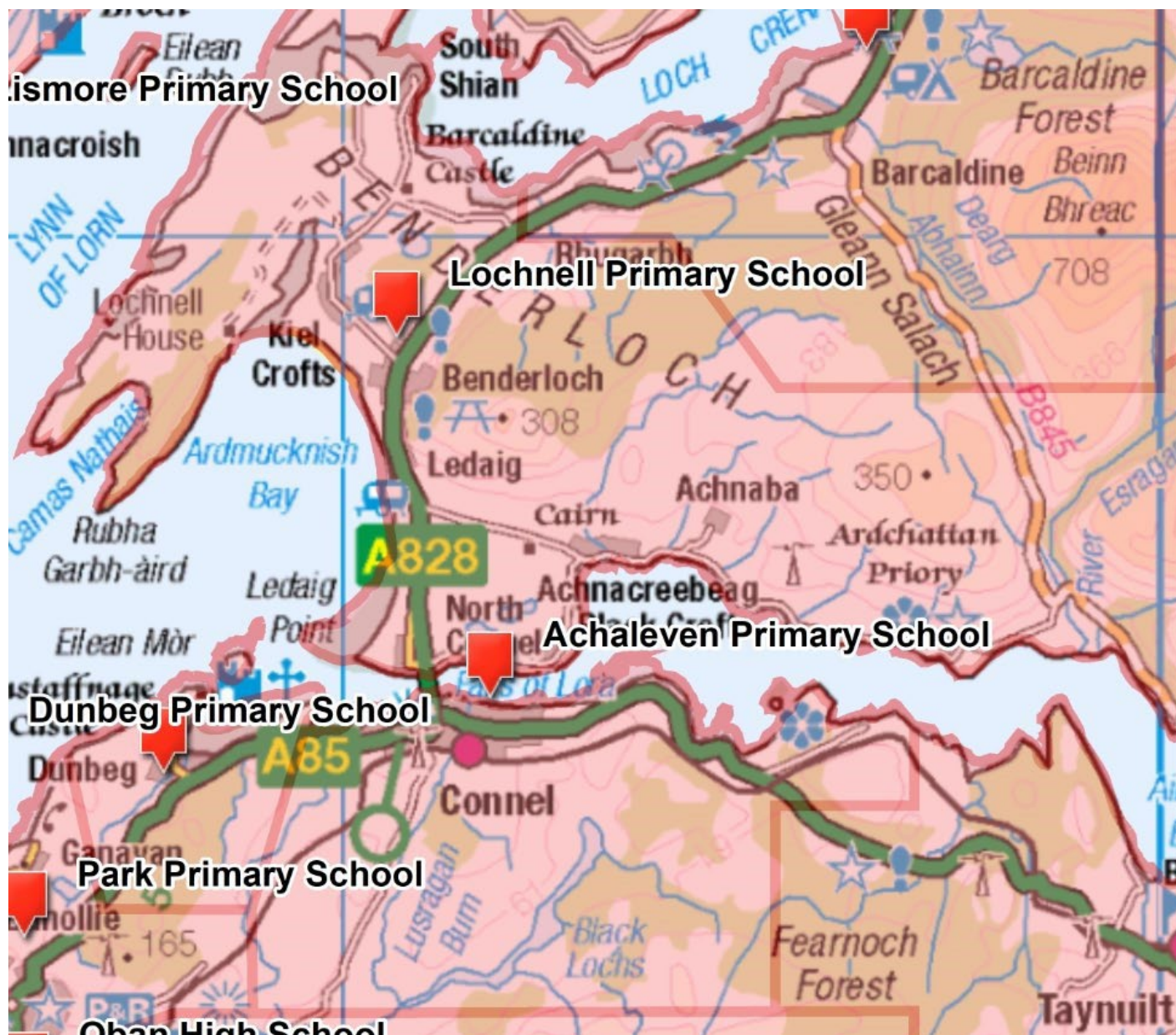
The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs. The school has very good links with Oban High School as their associated secondary school. Lochnell Primary has a Pre5 Unit within the school for 3 and 4 year olds.

Dunbeg Primary School is a non-denominational and co-educational school situated in the village of Dunbeg approximately three miles from the town of Oban. It is a single storey building originally opened in 1960 and has an extension to facilitate community activities. Recent additions include toilet/shower facilities for children with additional needs. Facing west are five classrooms and hall with large windows that provide a bright and pleasant working atmosphere. In front is a split-level play area with garden and netball court.

To one side is a games field and to the other a well-equipped play park for younger children. With capacity for 174 children of all denominations from P1-7, it also provides preschool education with spaces for 20 3–5 year olds. The school has very good links with Oban High School as their associated secondary school.

The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2021 classifies Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools as 'very remote rural'. Oban High School is the associated Secondary School for all three primary schools.

The Map below shows the adjoining catchment areas of Achaleven and Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools Catchment Areas:



3.10 Pupil Numbers

Pupil projections, and data for 2023-24 are based on the 2022 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 currently based on the 3 year average intake figure. Historical data shows that from 2014-2020, an average of 5 placing requests were made to schools out-with the Achaleven Primary School catchment area. This had a significant impact on the roll of Achaleven Primary School. There are currently 36 primary aged children residing in the Achaleven Primary School catchment. 20 of these children currently attend Lochnell Primary School and 16 currently attend Dunbeg Primary School.

Table 2 shows the historic and current pupil numbers for both Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary schools:

Table 2:	Achaleven PS	Dunbeg PS	Lochnell PS
Capacity	41	174	147
	Roll	Roll	Roll
2008-09	39	80	92
2009-2010	27	81	87
2010-2011	8	79	92
2011-2012	0	76	96
2012-2013	4	73	101
2013-2014	5	76	112
2014-2015	9	81	109
2015-2016	10	82	114
2016-2017	12	78	124
2017-2018	9	99	130
2018-19	13	88	124
2019-20	9	98	114
2020-21	7	90	112
2021-22	0	88	119
2022-23	0	89	118

Table 3 shows projected rolls for Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools according to figures held by Argyll and Bute Council:

Table 3:	Achaleven PS	Dunbeg PS	Lochnell PS
Capacity	41	174	147
2023 -2024	1	125	116
2024 -2025	0	128	114
2025-2026	0	130	122

* A prediction based on information available date

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Meetings

A Community Engagement Meeting was held in Achaleven Primary School, on December 1st, 2022 from 13:00-19:00 hours. This was to seek the views of the community on the future

of Achaleven School. This meeting was attended by 5 people from 3 households. There are currently no primary aged children in Lochnell Primary who previously attended Achaleven Primary School, and there are currently 2 primary aged children in Dunbeg Primary who previously attended Achaleven Primary School.

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 year and a half, what has been the effect of mothballing Achaleven 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*

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 Achaleven School:

• **Community and Parents**

The majority of the community 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. The majority of the community felt that it would be disappointing if the building lay empty and became derelict and were keen to explore other options for the building should the school close permanently. Parents of children with very young children expressed concern that the school may be closed but agreed this may be the best option when projected numbers were clarified.

• **Staff**

Staff members acknowledged that without a significant number of pupils, reopening the school is not viable.

General Comments:

'I don't think I would send my children to Achaleven if there were only a few other children in the school.'

'I already send my children to Lochnell as there is also Pre 5 provision there and transport is easy'

'Continued mothballing would mean further deterioration to the building and it may end up beyond repair which would be a shame'

'Mothballing could be beneficial if there are a viable number of children due to start at Achaleven in the next few years but it wouldn't be good for the children if there were going to be very low numbers in classes and across the school'

'Is there enough capacity at other local schools to accommodate pupils from Achaleven in the future?'

'It would be beneficial to have a safe cycle route to Dunbeg'

'If projected numbers are very low or non-existent then it makes more sense to close'

Pupil comments

'I was worried and optimistic. The old school was small. We are a lot happier at Dunbeg than we were at Achaleven.'

'I was worried about moving from a small to a really big school. I was not used to it. I was pretty ok afterwards. If I had to go back to a small school I'd feel pretty confused and I'd not be used to it.'

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

Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021. The school roll was very low and there were no pupils projected to attend in August 2021 or August 2022. The roll is not predicted to rise above 1 pupil in the near future. There is very little community support for the reopening of the school.

Whilst the building is mothballed it continues to deteriorate. The community is keen to ensure a future for the building if possible. Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. In January 2023 there were 15.9 fte vacancies for both Head Teachers and Teachers.

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

- a) Re-open Achaleven Primary School.
- b) Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary with the pupils zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools.
- c) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School

- d) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School.

6. OPTION A: RE-OPEN ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL

6.1 Community Feedback

Of the 5 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.

Pupil comment

‘Over all closing it was a healthy decision. It was really small and you couldn’t really make friends.’

6.2 Pupil Numbers

If the school were to reopen in August 2023, the maximum Primary 1 intake in terms of catchment pupils would be one. It has been stated that without a viable number of pupils for the School, parents would not be considering placing their children to attend Achaleven Primary School if it were to re-open. In the six years from 2014-2020 (before the school was mothballed in August 2021), an average of 5 placing requests were made to schools out-with the catchment each year. Currently, there are 36 primary school aged children residing within the catchment area for Achaleven Primary School. 20 of these pupils attend Lochnell Primary School and 16 attend Dunbeg Primary School.

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

Achaleven Primary	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Approved Capacity	41	41	41	41
Roll Projection	1	0	0	0

6.3 Financial Information

The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£140, 660³**

The annual cost of mothballing Achaleven Primary School is **£5,400**.

³ Annual costs for running a comparative school for Achaleven Primary School.

The cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£25,465**.

6.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being considered are as stated at Section 2 of this report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School to increase. Achaleven Primary School is currently mothballed and there were no pupils enrolled to start Primary 1 in either August 2021 or August 2022. 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, as they did in the past. The presence of a school and the facilities/activities that may be offered could make the area a more attractive place to live although it is recognised that two other primary schools are nearby. 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 event indicated that it would be worthwhile to explore the repurposing of the school building to become a facility for the community to use rather than an educational establishment.

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 Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes by car/bus. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes by car/bus. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. If Achaleven 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

5 people attended the consultation and the majority were not in favour of reopening Achaleven Primary as a school. If the school reopened, projected P1 pupil numbers for August 2023 would be one, and this is predicted to decrease over the next three years. There are currently 36 children residing in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area, 20 of these pupils attend Lochnell Primary School and 16 attend Dunbeg Primary School. An average of 5 placing requests to schools out-with the Achaleven catchment area have been made each academic session from 2014 until the school was mothballed in 2021. This has had a significant impact on the school roll and the Primary 1 intake.

There are financial implications if the school is to be reopened. The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to reopen the school is **£140,660⁴**, with the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£25, 465**.

If the School was to be reopened, the premises would be able to be used by the community out-with school hours as a hub, in addition to its use as an educational facility. However, Connel Village Hall is a short distance from the school and is currently used for community events. The reopening of the School may encourage families with school age children to move to the community, which may make the community more sustainable.

⁴ Annual costs for running a comparative school for Achaleven.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes by car/bus. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes by car/bus. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. If Achaleven 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.

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, the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard and the lack of local support for reopening Achaleven Primary School this is not considered to be a reasonable option.

7. OPTION B: CONTINUED MOTHBALLING OF ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS ZONED TO LOCHNELL AND DUNBEG PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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.”* Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021.

7.1 Community Feedback

There are some ideas for the future of the building which may be taken forward by the community as a hub for community life, although it was noted that Connel Village Hall is only 330 yards from the school. 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:

‘We are concerned that the building falls into disrepair and becomes derelict or an eyesore’

‘It would be good to discuss potential future use of the building at a Community Council Meeting’

‘It would be good if the building could house a nursery provision but understand that low numbers may mean that this is not viable’

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 2022/23 to the Council of the mothballed Achaleven Primary School is **£5,400**. 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 **£25,465**. Pupils living in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area are currently transported to Lochnell Primary and Dunbeg Primary through parental choice. A Council minibus transports the pupils to Dunbeg Primary at a cost of approximately **£19,009** per annum and a West Coast Motors service bus transports the pupils to Lochnell Primary. Due to the fact that the West Coast Motors service operates on an existing route and is part of a larger contract, there is no additional cost to transport pupils from Achaleven to Lochnell Primary School.

7.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being considered are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation that the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School will increase. Achaleven 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 Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools there would be no change to the current impact on the community. If the mothballing of Achaleven was to continue the building would deteriorate further and eventually become unavailable. This could have a detrimental effect on the sustainability of the Achaleven community. At present the school grounds are available for community use. The small number of community residents who attended the meeting view the buildings and grounds as a potential opportunity to develop a community hub and there were some suggestions for possible usage. This may make the area a more attractive place to live, and in turn, may positively impact community sustainability.

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 Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828 and travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. Continued mothballing of Achaleven 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. Pupils living in the Achaleven

Primary School catchment area are currently transported to Lochnell Primary and Dunbeg Primary through parental choice. Currently, a Council minibus transports the pupils to Dunbeg Primary and a West Coast Motors service bus transports the pupils to Lochnell Primary.

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.

Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell are remote rural schools. Each school is set within a very remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Achaleven area, attending Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools are benefitting from the broader rural environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. High quality outdoor learning is currently provided at both primary schools.

The co-location of the nursery and the primary classes at Dunbeg and Lochnell Primaries enhances the transition process for the children moving from Nursery into Primary one, through joint educational processes and liaison between the 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 mothballing of Achaleven Primary School if projected pupil numbers were not expected to rise. There was a 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 (2022/23) to the Council of the mothballed Achaleven Primary School is **£5,400**. 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 **£25,465**. There is no current annual transport cost for taking pupils to an alternative school.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828 and travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Adverse weather can be a factor, however this is the same for other local schools and areas. Pupils living in the Achaleven Primary School catchment

area are currently transported to Lochnell Primary and Dunbeg Primary through parental choice. A Council minibus transports the pupils to Dunbeg Primary and a West Coast Motors service bus transports the pupils to Lochnell Primary. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Should the school continue to be mothballed these travel arrangements would continue.

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

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

8. OPTION C: CLOSE ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR DUNBEG PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT ACHALEVEN CATCHMENT AREA

8.1 Community Feedback

The majority of people who attended the Options Appraisal meeting were not in favour of reopening Achaleven Primary as a school given the very low/ no projected pupil numbers. They commented that there were not enough children to support re-opening the School. Additionally, with respect to very low/ non-existent 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 Achaleven Primary School and attendance at Dunbeg Primary School were generally positive:

'It would be beneficial if there was a safe walk or cycling route to Dunbeg'

'I would prefer that my child was able to walk or cycle to school but appreciate that in a more rural setting, this isn't always possible'

Pupil comments

'I wouldn't mind it (Achaleven) staying open but I would be upset to have to go back. I'd like to stay here. I like a big school.'

8.2 Pupil Numbers

Table 5: Schools Occupancy:

Primary	2023/2024	2024/25
Dunbeg Approved Capacity	174	174
Dunbeg Projected Roll	125	128

<i>Achaleven Projected Roll</i>	1	0
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	126	128
<i>Occupancy</i>	72.4%	73.5%

Pupils from Achaleven Primary catchment area would attend Dunbeg Primary School, as there are currently no pupils attending Achaleven there is no significant projected addition to school roll at Dunbeg Primary School. The current occupancy rate for Dunbeg Primary School is 51%. There is a projected roll of one pupil for Achaleven Primary for August 2023. This coupled with an increase in projected pupil numbers within the catchment area will take the roll for Dunbeg Primary from 89 in session 2022/23 to 126 in session 2023/24. The significant increase forecast is due to new house building taking place in the area. The projected school roll for Dunbeg Primary School is expected to increase incrementally over the next 9 years. By 2030, Dunbeg Primary School is expected to have an occupancy rate of 90%.

8.3 Financial Information

If the existing council minibus was to be used, this would cost approximately **£19,009** per annum. If Achaleven Primary School were to be closed it would generate savings of **£5,400** - the current annual cost of mothballing (2022/23) to the Council. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs.

8.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being reviewed are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School to increase. Achaleven 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.

8.4.1 Community Impact

The community supported the proposed closure of the school with the building and adjoining grounds being retained for community use where viable. All people who attended the consultation stated that they would be in favour of preliminary work to investigate whether the school building could be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the visual impact of the village. While it is accepted that school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, a community hub could be an asset to a community. However, as previously stated, Connel Village Hall is situated 330 yards from Achaleven Primary School and is used for village events. 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 may 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.

8.4.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. This option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School, in terms of travel would have a neutral effect on the environment. There is currently an annual transport cost of approximately **£19,009** per annum for pupils to travel to Dunbeg Primary School on a council mini bus. Going forward, this cost would continue to be incurred annually.

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 as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

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

In Dunbeg 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.

8.6 **Summary**

The majority of people who attended the Community Engagement event were in favour of closing Achaleven Primary as a school. They also commented on the potential for the school premises to be used as a community asset.

The current capacity for Dunbeg Primary School is 51%, however, due to house building within the catchment, there is expected to be a significant increase in the school roll and therefore a significant increase in the occupancy rate of the school. This is projected to be 72.4% by August 2023 and 90% by August 2030. The additional

annual cost to transport pupils to Dunbeg Primary school on a council mini bus is approximately £19,009 per annum. Going forward, this cost would continue to be incurred annually.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85 and this option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School would therefore have a neutral effect on the environment. Dunbeg Primary currently accommodates pupils from Achaleven School and pupil numbers travelling from the current Achaleven catchment area are not projected to increase significantly. However, Dunbeg Primary has limited capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers due to the projected increase in the roll through an increase in pupils residing within the catchment area.

On the basis, as detailed previously, that the school roll at Dunbeg Primary is projected to increase significantly and therefore the school capacity rate will also increase annually for the foreseeable future, the closure of Achaleven Primary School and realignment of the Dunbeg Primary School catchment area to include the current Achaleven Primary School catchment is not viewed as a reasonable option.

9. OPTION D: CLOSE ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR LOCHNELL PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL CATCHMENT AREA

9.1 Community Feedback

The majority of people who attended the Options Appraisal meeting were not in favour of reopening Achaleven Primary as a school given the very low/no projected pupil numbers. They commented that there were not enough children to support re-opening the School. Additionally, with respect to very low/ non-existent 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 Achaleven Primary School and attendance at Lochnell Primary School were generally positive:

'I already send my children to Lochnell Primary School and transport is easy'

'I would prefer that my child was able to walk or cycle to school but appreciate that in a more rural setting, this isn't always possible'

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 nursery and café.'

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

9.2 Pupil Numbers

Table 5: Schools Occupancy:

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2023/2024</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>Lochnell Approved Capacity</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Primary</i>	<i>2023/2024</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>Lochnell Projected Roll</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Achaleven Projected Roll</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Occupancy</i>	<i>79.6%</i>	<i>77.6%</i>

Pupils from Achaleven Primary catchment area would attend Lochnell Primary School. As there are currently no pupils attending Achaleven there is no projected addition to school roll at Lochnell Primary School. The current occupancy rate for Lochnell Primary School is 80%. There is a projected roll of one pupil for Achaleven Primary for August 2023, this would take the projected roll for Lochnell Primary to 117.

9.3 Financial Information

An existing West Coast bus means that there would be no additional annual transport costs. If Achaleven Primary School were to be closed it would generate savings of **£5,400** - the current annual cost of mothballing (2022/23) 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 Achaleven Primary School is being reviewed are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School to increase. Achaleven 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 supported the proposed closure of the school with the building and adjoining grounds being retained for community use where viable. All people who attended the consultation stated that they would be in favour of preliminary work to investigate whether the school building could be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the visual impact of the village. While it is accepted that school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, a community hub

could be an asset to a community. However, as previously stated, Connel Village Hall is situated 330 yards from Achaleven Primary School and is used for village events. 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 may 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 Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and the A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. This option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven 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 Lochnell Primary School as it is part of an existing West Coast Motors service bus and therefore 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 Lochnell and Achaleven are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Achaleven area who would attend Lochnell Primary School are benefitting from the broader rural environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. High quality outdoor learning is currently provided at Lochnell Primary. The pupils would then be transitioning to Oban High School with an established friendship group.

In Lochnell 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 Community Engagement event were in favour of closing Achaleven Primary as a school. They also commented on the potential for the school premises to be used as a community asset.

Current capacity for Lochnell Primary School is 80%, with no significant increase to the school roll predicted in forthcoming years. There is no additional annual cost to transport pupils to Lochnell Primary school as this is part of an existing route and wider contract with West Coast Motors and use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would not incur additional costs.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and the A828 and this option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School would therefore have a neutral effect on the environment. Lochnell Primary currently accommodates pupils from Achaleven Primary School's catchment area, and pupil numbers are not projected to increase significantly. Lochnell Primary has capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers.

In Lochnell Primary School, children benefit from a very positive learning environment with learning and teaching which is well matched to the needs of the young people who attend the school. In addition there is a clear focus on nurturing the health and wellbeing of pupils.

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

9. OVERVIEW OF OPTIONS

Option	Option Description	Outcome
A	Re-open Achaleven Primary School with the existing catchment area	Not a reasonable option.
B	Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary School with the pupils zoned to Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools	Not a reasonable option.
C	Close Achaleven Primary School and realign the catchment area of Dunbeg Primary School to include the current catchment area for Achaleven Primary School.	Not a reasonable option.
D	Close Achaleven Primary School and realign the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area for Achaleven Primary School.	A reasonable option with some representation that the school becomes a facility the community can develop if viable.

10. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF REASONABLE OPTION: CLOSE ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR LOCHNELL PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT ACHALEVEN CATCHMENT AREA

10.1 Pupil Projections

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2023/2024</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>Lochnell Approved Capacity</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Lochnell Projected Roll</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Achaleven Projected Roll</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Occupancy</i>	<i>79.6%</i>	<i>77.6%</i>

10.2 Educational Benefits

This statement focusses on Lochnell Primary School which is one of the schools that parents/carers within the Achaleven Catchment can currently choose to send their child to, and the school which would subsume Achaleven's current catchment area as part of Option D.

10.2.1 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.

The school are committed to providing appropriate opportunities for the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural values through both the ethos and the curriculum. This is undertaken in partnership with parents/carers and takes account of the individual needs of pupils and the views of parents/carers.

The aim of Lochnell Primary School and Early Years is to ensure each child feels safe and happy so that they may achieve their potential. To do this, the school follow the principles of being Ready, Respectful and Safe (RRS). These principles sit alongside their core values which were reviewed and refreshed in January 2020. The core school values are: Kind, ambitious, fun, inclusive and curious.

- The aims of Lochnell Primary are to:
- Inspire curiosity and creativity through rich learning experiences.
 - Encourage ambition by opening minds, aiming high and celebrating achievements.
 - Develop kindness through an ethos of inclusion and mutual respect.
 - Enable appreciation and consideration of our local community and the wider world.
 - Create a calm, purposeful and fun learning environment where learners feel valued.
 - Continue to evaluate, evolve and excel!

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 Lochnell 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. The general aim of the school is to provide an atmosphere of mutual respect and collective responsibility. Pupils, parents/carers and staff all have an important part to play in producing and sustaining this positive ethos.

Lochnell Primary School welcomes and encourages diversity and individuality, while emphasizing their common commitment to moral values such as honesty, respect for others, compassion and justice. Fundamental principles of the school are that all who are involved in the life of the school have the right to be respected as individuals and carry the responsibility to act in a considerate and respectful manner towards

others. The school are firmly committed to the elimination of any form of discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, gender or disability.

Lochnell has a working partnership with the village church and enjoy visits to church (virtual or in person) to celebrate special events throughout the year. The pupils also enjoy visits to the school and early years setting by the local minister. They welcome connections to other faiths and have linked with members of different faiths to provide a context for their curriculum and enhance understanding. Lochnell School, its resources and activities provide a focal point for the community. The involvement of parents/carers and other members of the community in school activities is highly valued and increases the range of experiences on offer for learners.

Parents are kept informed of school activities and the school are currently reviewing how best to do this. Parents/carers are always welcome to call at the school for further information and/or to arrange to see the Head Teacher.

Having an early years setting alongside the school has improved transition and liaison. However, the school are careful to maintain links with the other pre-5 groups in the area to ensure a smooth transition process into P1 for all.

Links with other Oban and Lorn Primary schools are strong and when possible, the pupils enjoy activities throughout the year to share their learning and skills. Active Schools provide many opportunities for the pupils and there is an ongoing programme to train Young Leaders, ensuring additional leadership opportunities within the school.

Lochnell School has very strong links with Oban High and this makes the transition from P7 to S1 smooth and productive, ensuring that all pupils are well support as they move to High School.

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

10.2.2

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.

10.2.3

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. Throughout the school session there are opportunities for the children to take part in wider – curricular activities and after school clubs.

The variety, frequency and nature of the clubs depends on the availability of staff and senior pupils and parents to run and supervise them. More information is available from the school office.

Educational visits are an important part of the learning process and it is crucial to use our environment as a learning resource. The number and scope of these visits is governed by our financial situation and the opportunities available. Parents and carers help us supervise these outings and we are grateful for the enthusiastic help. Groups from the school compete in local festivals and competitions

10.2.4

Environment for Learning

Lochnell Primary School is situated in the village of Benderloch on the main Oban to Fort William road. The building is single storey and was opened in 1992. The teaching bays in the original building are semi open plan. The new extension teaching bays are open plan. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the primary school.

A joint school and community project was completed to provide and maintain an all weather pitch adjacent to the school. The pitch is used very well by the school every day. The community have access to the pitch out with school times and the public can book it at the local garage.

The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs. They enjoy good links with Oban High School as the associated secondary school. Lochnell Primary has a Pre5 Unit within the school for 3 and 4 year olds.

10.3 Assessment of Rural Factors

The reasons why the future of Achaleven 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. Achaleven Primary School is mothballed with no current pupils. Having considered all the alternatives above, the option to close Achaleven Primary School and realign the catchment area for Lochnell Primary School to include the former Achaleven Primary School catchment area is considered the most reasonable means to address the reasons identified at Section 2 of this report.

10.3.1 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 Achaleven there is a Village Hall which houses community events. All people who attended the Options Appraisal Meeting stated that if possible they would prefer to see the school building 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. Formal closure of the school would mean that future plans for the building could potentially be progressed by the community.

10.3.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. Pupils will travel on the existing West Coast Motors service bus and eventually all the pupils will travel to Lochnell Primary School. The environmental impact of travel will be minimal, as these arrangements are currently in place due to the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. The closure of Achaleven Primary School, in terms of travel, would have a neutral effect on the environment. There is currently no additional annual transport cost of taking pupils to Lochnell Primary School and the continued use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would mean there are no future cost implications.

10.4 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 Achaleven Primary School are a total of **£5,400**.

Annual savings generated through closing Achaleven Primary School would be **£5,400**.

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 the local community.

10.5 Environmental Impact

Currently some pupils travel to Lochnell 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 Lochnell Primary School, a relatively short journey. Travel is an accepted aspect of rural life.

11. CONCLUSION

Four alternative options have been reviewed in considering the future of Achaleven 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.

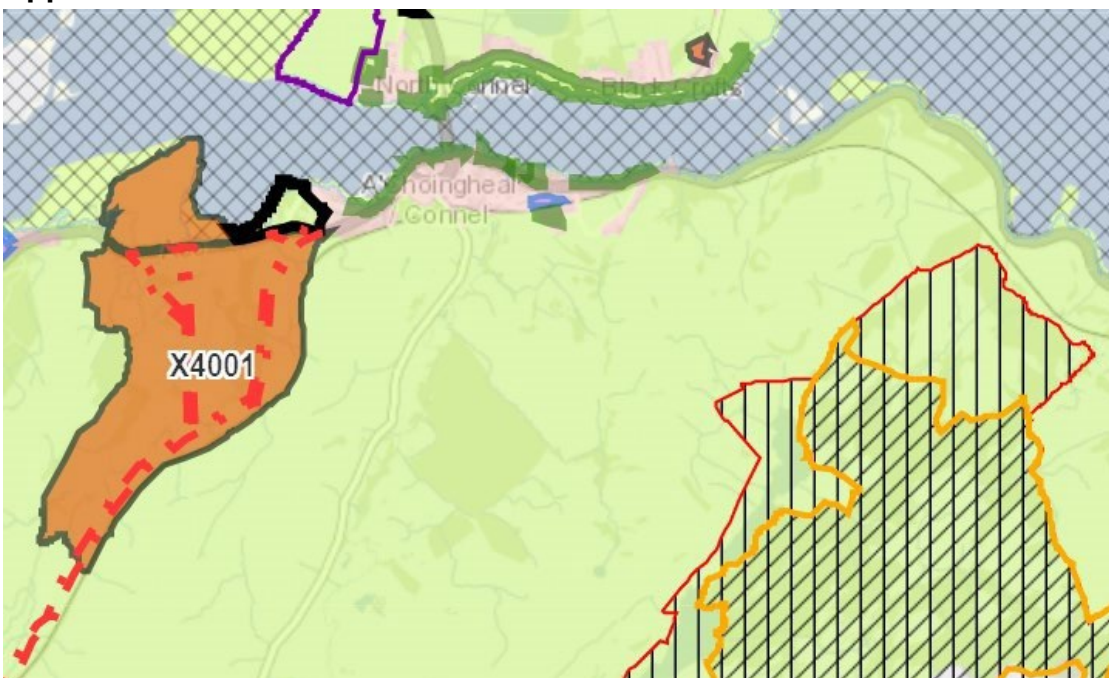
After consideration of the preliminary requirements, as set out in the Act, and the options, and having regard to the specific reasons identified at Section 2 of this report, closing Achaleven Primary School and realigning the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area for

Achaleven Primary School is the most reasonable option in order to address the underlying 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 closure proposal that will come back to a future meeting of the Committee in August 2023 for approval by Members which would subsequently trigger the formal consultation process under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

Appendix 1

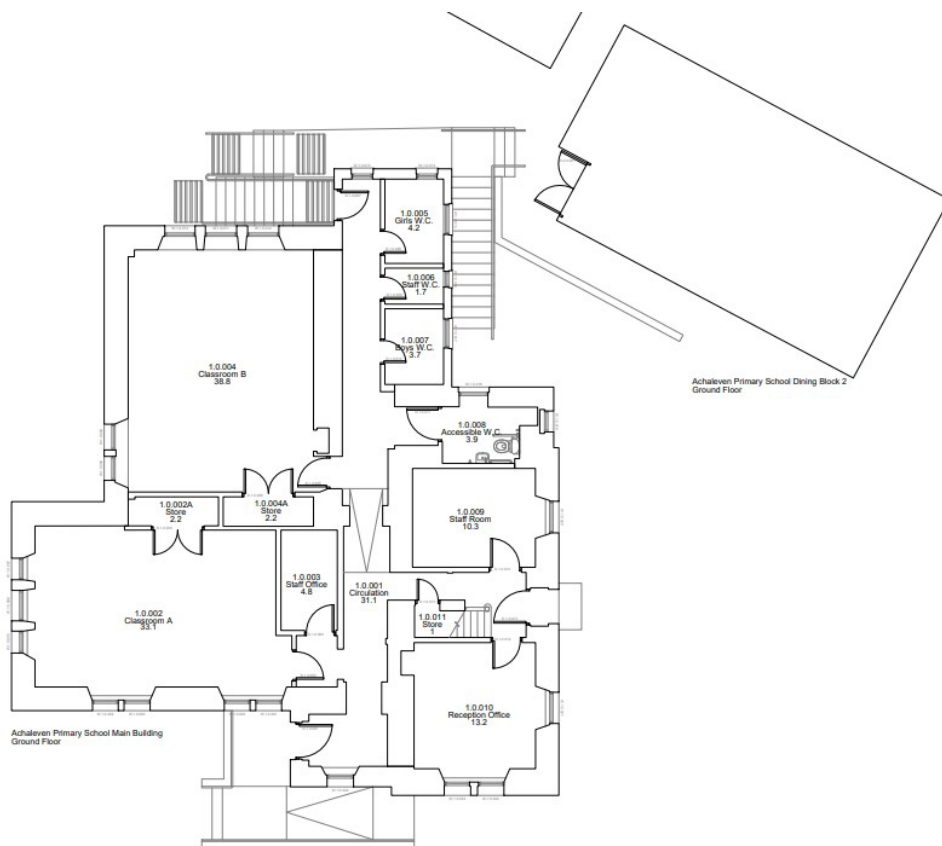



Appendix 2

Development Management Zones

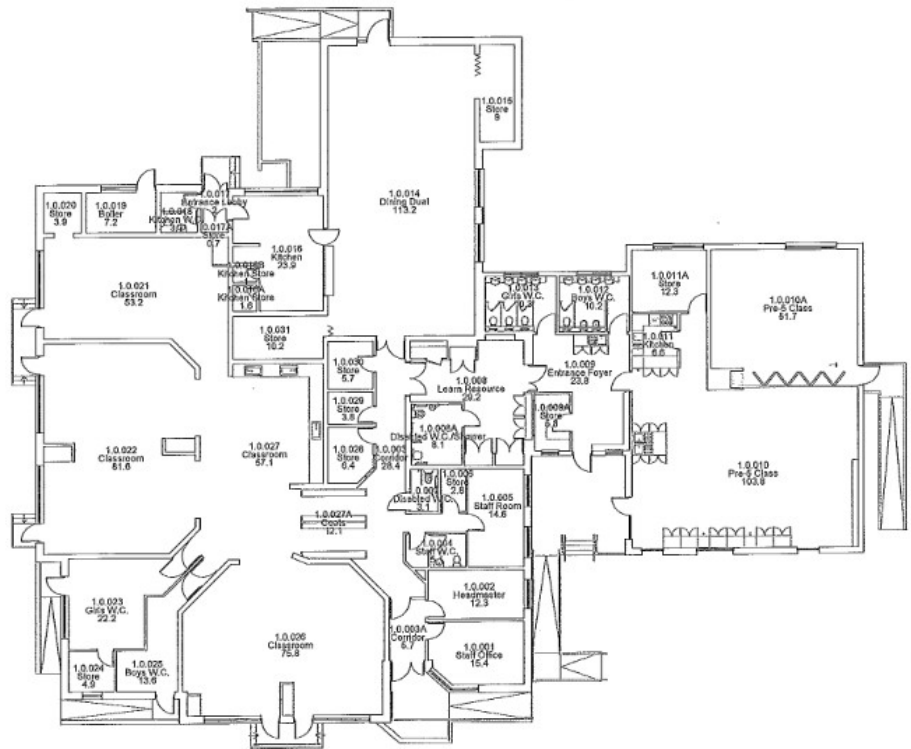
-  Countryside Zone
-  Greenbelt
-  Rural Opportunity Area
-  Settlement Zone - Main Town
-  Settlement Zone - Key Settlement
-  Settlement Zone - Key Rural Settlement
-  Settlement Zone - Village / Minor Settlement
- Very Sensitive Countryside

Appendix 3: Floorplan Achaleven Primary School



Current Main Block GIA, Jan 2016 = 170.4m ²	
Rev.	Description
1	Issue for Design
Customer Services Property Design Team	
	
Phone: 01546 602127 http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk	
Site Achaleven Primary School	
Location Connell	Postcode PA37 1PH
Project ---	
Drawing Current Ground Floor Plan	
Site URPO PE12000010001	Project No. ---
Drawing No. AEL(00)001	Revision ---
Drawn By mm	Date Jan 2016
	Scale @ A0 1:50

Appendix 4: Floorplan Lochnell Primary School



Lochnell Primary School Main Building
Ground Floor Plan

Rev	Date	Description	Drawn By
-	01/03/14	-	-

Customer Services
Property Design Team

Phone: 01546 607127
<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk>

**Argyll
Bute
COUNCIL**

Site
Lochnell Primary School

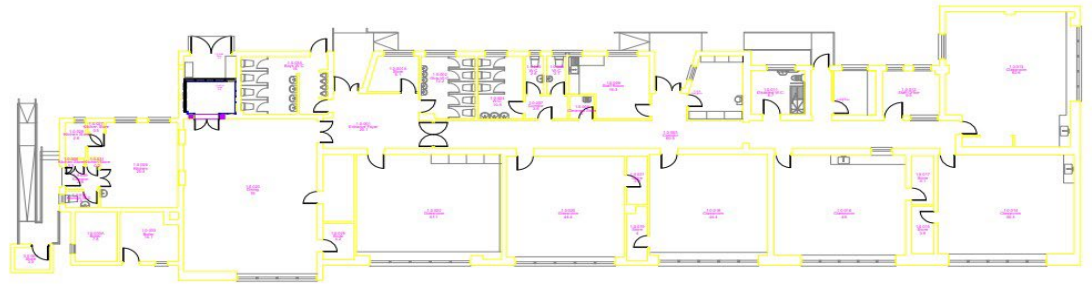
Location Ledaig	Postcode PA37 1RZ
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Project


Drawing
Current Ground Floor Plan

Site UPRN PE04705950001	Project No. ---
Drawing No. AEL(00)001	Revision ---

Drawn By RHS	Date January 2014	Scale @ A1 1:100
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Proposed Plan
Scale: 1:100

Customer Services Property Design Team		
Phone: 01546 602127 Web: www.argyll-bute.gov.uk		
Site Dunbeg Primary School		
Location --	Postcode PA37 1QF	
Project 1140 Hours		
Drawing Proposed Plan		
Site Ref: PE0502850001	Project No: 00321	
Drawing No: APL-00-002	Revision: ---	
Drawn By: FJR	Date: Feb. 2020	Scale @ A1: As shown

Appendix 5: Floorplan Dunbeg Primary School and ELC

APPENDIX 2

Argyll and Bute Council: Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Section 1: About the proposal

Title of Proposal

To close Achaleven Primary School

Intended outcome of proposal

<p>The proposal is to close Achaleven Primary School. The views of all stakeholders affected by this proposal were sought through the consultation phase.</p>

<p>The EqSEIA was reviewed and updated as required following the consultation period. A consultation report prepared on the issue by Local Authority Officers, with input from Education Scotland. This report will be presented to the Community Services Committee (CSC) for their decision.</p>
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<p>The proposed outcome is the closure of the school, which has been mothballed since June 2021. If after consultation the stakeholders involved in the process, Education Scotland, and the CSC feel that the closure is not a reasonable option, then the closure would not take place.</p>

Description of proposal

Consideration of this proposal means that a decision is being taken about permanently closing Achaleven Primary School. As per the legislative guidance set out in the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, Argyll and Bute Council has sought views on the following proposal, namely:

It is proposed that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31st May 2024.

Current catchment pupils of Achaleven Primary School will continue to be educated at Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary School.

The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.

Reasons for this proposal

This is the best option to address the reasons for the proposals which are;


- Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed for over 2 years. The school roll is very low and not predicted to rise significantly in the near future. All Achaleven catchment pupils attend schools out with the catchment area in accordance with placement requests submitted by parents.
- Along with several other rural Councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. At the time of writing the EQSEIA there are 10.84fte vacancies for both teachers and Head teachers in Argyll and Bute.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budget for maintenance. The annual cost of the mothballing of the building is £15,866.

On 24th August 2022, the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation and an Options Appraisal for Achaleven Primary School. On 24th August 2023, the Community Services Committee agreed to adopt the draft closure proposal and a statutory consultation took place from the 31st August 2023 to the 27th October 2023 with a public meeting taking place in Achaleven Primary School on 4th October 2023. In person focus groups were also held with children at Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary School on 29/09/23 and 02/10/23 respectively to ensure that their views were taken into account.

Business Outcome(s) / Corporate Outcome(s) to which the proposal contributes

Argyll & Bute's Annual Business Plan 2023-24:

Attaining and achieving at all stages; we will improve outcomes for our children and young people.

Lead officer details:	
Name of lead officer	Rachel Binnie
Job title	Acting Education Manager
Department	Customer Services Education
Appropriate officer details:	
Name of appropriate officer	Wendy Brownlie
Job title	Head of Education
Department	Customer Services Education
Sign off of EqSEIA	
Date of sign off	29/01/2024

Who will deliver the proposal?
<p>During the mothballing period children could attend Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary School. Should the closure go ahead pupils currently in these schools will remain in these schools but the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.</p> <p>Should the closure proposal go ahead from this point the Head Teacher of Lochnell Primary School will be the senior officer of the Council who provides the leadership of the educational experience for the children attending this school, who would have otherwise attended Achaleven Primary School. The Education Central team of the Council will be responsible for the support and challenge of the school as per standard protocols.</p> <p>Transport colleagues will be responsible for any travel arrangements for children who are entitled to this, and this has already been in place since the Achaleven Primary School was mothballed.</p>

Section 2: Evidence used in the course of carrying out EqSEIA

Consultation / engagement

Under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, if a local authority proposes to close a school it must undertake a statutory consultation with the 'relevant consultees' affected by this proposal. In this instance; Achaleven Primary School is the 'affected school'.

The formal consultation on the proposal within this document was undertaken under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the Act"). The consultation period started on 31st August 2023 (with due written notice of the proposal issued to the relevant consultees listed in Appendix 1) and ended on 27th October 2023. Written representations had to be received by this date in order to be taken into account.

A copy of the proposal document was provided to the following 'relevant consultees' in terms of the Act:

- The Parent Councils of the affected schools
- The parents of the pupils at the affected schools
- Parents of children expected to attend an affected school within 2 years of the date of publication of this Proposal Document
- The pupils, deemed to be of suitable age and maturity to be able to communicate a view on the proposal, at the affected schools
- The teaching and ancillary staff at the affected schools
- The trade unions representatives of the above staff
- Argyll and Bute Councillors – Ward 5: Oban North and Lorn
- Connel Community Council
- Ardchattan Community Council 3
- Dunbeg Community Council
- Community Planning Partnership
- The Constituency MSP
- List MSPs for the area
- The Constituency MP
- Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland
- Chief Executive, NHS Highland
- Chief Executive Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)
- Area Commander, Fire Scotland
- Education Scotland

The steps listed below were also been taken to ensure that the proposal was widely available:

- The proposal document was published on the Argyll and Bute Council website;
- This document could be made available in alternative forms or translated by contacting Argyll House, Dunoon, tel: 01369 708576 or argyllhoureception@argyll-bute.gov.uk;
- Information on the consultation and how to take part was also advertised in the Oban Times

The proposal paper was available at the following locations;

- Council Headquarters, Kilmory, Lochgilphead, Argyll, PA31 8RT
- Education Offices, Argyll House, Dunoon, Argyll, PA23 8AJ
- Lochnell Primary School, Benderloch, Oban, Argyll, PA37 1QS
- Dunbeg Primary School, Dunbeg, Argyll, PA37 1QF
- Connel Village Hall, Lora Rd, Connel, Argyll PA37 1PA
- Oban Library, 77 Albany Street, Oban PA34 5AL6.4

There was a public meeting held on the 4th October 2023 at 6.00pm in Achaleven Primary School.

The catchment area for Achaleven Primary School is classed as remote rural. The definition for remote rural are settlements with a population of less than 3,000 with a greater than 30 minute drive time to the nearest settlement with a population of 10,000 or more.

Data

The Scottish Government's Rural School List (October 2021) classifies Achaleven 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.

Using available data from the Small Area Population Estimates (2011 data Zone) Achaleven Primary School falls into the Benderloch Trail-01 area. It should be noted that this area includes catchment areas for other local schools.

SIMD	Quintile 4
Population	1,111
School/nursery aged children	
0-4	51
5-11	108
12-18	87

[Mid-2021 Small Area Population Estimates for 2011 Data Zones | National Records of Scotland \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/mid-2021-small-area-population-estimates-for-2011-data-zones)

Table 2:	Achaleven
Capacity	41
	Roll
2008-2009	39
2009-2010	27
2010-2011	8
2011-2012	0
2012-2013	4
2013-2014	5
2014-2015	9
2015-2016	10
2016-2017	12
2017-2018	9
2018-2019	13
2019-2020	9
2020-2021	7
2021-22	0
2022-23	0
2023 -2024	0

The school roll has fallen considerably over several years with a short period of mothballing in 2011/12.

There have been no further enrolments or enquiries since mothballing over 2 years ago. Data as of July 2023 showed 7 children in the Achaleven catchment area eligible to enrol in Primary 1. All children enrolled in other local schools.

The role is not projected to rise significantly in the future.

The historical trend has been for parents to send their children to other local, larger schools.

Further information on the proposed closure, reasons for the proposal, consideration of impact and educational benefits can be found in the full proposal paper.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

Lochnell Primary School lies 3.6miles from Achaleven approximately and additional 8minutes travel.

Other information

Evidence for this proposal was found in the Equality Evidence Finder, and in the Guidance for the Fairer Scotland Act.

Additional evidence was found in the School (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, in terms of legislative compliance. Education management circulars, 1.33 on capacity, 3.01 on admission and 3.09 on transfers were also consulted. The circular 3.23 on child protection and safeguarding was also considered.

The national policy of GIRFEC – Getting it Right for Every Child, was also considered in the formation of this proposal as was the Argyll and Bute Education vision and strategy, Our Children, Their Future.

Gaps in evidence

There are no gaps in evidence.

Section 3: Impact of proposal

Impact on service users:

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		
Disability			X	

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Ethnicity		X		
Sex		X		
Gender reassignment		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				
Mainland rural population	X			
Island populations		X		
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation		X		
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background		X		
Communities of place	X			
Communities of interest		X		

If you have identified any impacts on service users, explain what these will be.

Referring to the Fairer Scotland Act there could be potential negative impacts in relation to

mainland rural and communities of place. The potential negative impact has been considered below.

The reasons for the closure proposal have been set out in detail in the Options Appraisal and Proposal Paper.

A copy of this document is available on the Argyll and Bute Council website:

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

This has made due regard to potential impacts on the community, travel and the children.

Since mothballing Achaleven Primary School has not been used for any community event or meeting. The local community have access to Connel Village Hall approximately 300yards from the school.

Views have been gathered from stakeholders throughout the process. At the time of the Options appraisal the majority of stakeholders favoured the closure of the school due to low pupil numbers. All were keen to explore options for the future use of the building should the closure go ahead. A group of local parents have explored the option of an ELC and have discussed the closure process and their proposals with members of the education central team. At the stakeholder meeting a local business

were keen to discuss their proposal for future use of the business which included a community hub should the proposal for closure go ahead.

Until the proposal to close the school is fully agreed it is not possible to take forward any alternative uses.

The further consultation had 1 written response and 3 members of the public attended the public meeting. None opposed the closure of the school and 2 members of the public discussed possible use for business and community purposes of the school building.

The school roll has been falling steadily for several years. The historical, and continuing trend, is for parents to place their children in other larger local schools which includes Lochnell Primary School.

For a full account of the educational benefits of the closure proposal please refer to the Options Appraisal and the Proposal Paper (see link above).

Impact on travel and the environment has been further considered. Lochnell is 3.6 miles from Achaleven Primary School, approximately an additional 8 minutes travel time. As the current travel arrangements for pupils have been in place since mothballing there is no adverse effect on pupils or staff should the closure go ahead. Views from stakeholders have not raised travel as a concern. Children from the Achaleven catchment area have historically gone to other schools in the local area with the associated travel.

If any 'don't know's have been identified, at what point will impacts on these groups become identifiable?

Impact on service deliverers (including employees, volunteers etc):

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Protected characteristics:				
Age		X		
Disability		X		
Ethnicity		X		
Sex		X		
Gender reassignment		X		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		X		
Pregnancy and Maternity		X		
Religion		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		
Fairer Scotland Duty:				

	Negative	No impact	Positive	Don't know
Mainland rural population	X			
Island populations		X		
Low income		X		
Low wealth		X		
Material deprivation		X		
Area deprivation		X		
Socio-economic background		X		
Communities of place		X		
Communities of interest	X			

If you have identified any impacts on service deliverers, explain what these will be.

As before, the proposed closure of the school could adversely affect local community people who may wish to volunteer as they would now need to travel. However the children being in a larger school would mean that there will be more opportunities for local volunteers and services to be involved and support the school community.

Previously there were no regular volunteers in the school with parents helping when requested for certain school activities.

As the school has been mothballed for over 2 years there would be no impact on employees and staff would benefit from being in a larger school being able to work collaboratively.

If any 'don't know's have been identified, at what point will impacts on these groups become identifiable?

How has 'due regard' been given to any negative impacts that have been identified?

The proposal has taken due regard to any negative impacts of this proposal. In looking at the educational benefits statement of this proposal these have been considered. All information is contained in the proposal paper.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/school-consultations-and-proposals>

Section 4: Interdependencies

Is this proposal likely to have any knock-on effects for any other activities carried out by or on behalf of the council?	Yes
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Details of knock-on effects identified
Transport is already in place for children travelling from the Achaleven catchment area to Lochnell Primary School, there is no knock on effects for any other activities carried out by the council. School estates would be involved in disposal/future use of the building should the closure proposal go ahead.

Section 5: Monitoring and review

How will you monitor and evaluate the equality impacts of your proposal?
Should the proposal for the closure of Achaleven Primary School go ahead then the Education Central Team will monitor the arrangements in place to ensure children and families' needs are met and make adjustments if required.

APPENDIX 3

**Argyll and Bute Council
Education**



RESPONSE FORM

I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Elected Members and Council Officers of Argyll and Bute Council.

<u>Proposal</u>	
It is proposed that: Education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31 st May 2024. The catchment area of Lochnell Primary School shall be extended to include the current catchment area of Achaleven Primary School.	
This part of the form must be completed for a valid response:	
Name: (please print) Dr Arlene Ditchfield (Chair of Dunbeg Primary School Parent Council & parent of 2 children in Dunbeg Primary)	Address: 10 Tynribbie place, Tynribbie, Appin
	Post Code: PA38 4DS
I agree that my response can be made publicly available	
Signature:	Date: 23/10/23

YOUR INTEREST: (please tick)

Parent X <input type="checkbox"/>	Child / Young Person <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Other * X <input type="checkbox"/>
Elected Member / MSP / MP <input type="checkbox"/>		Member of Community Council <input type="checkbox"/>	
*Other: (please specify) Parent and Chair of Dunbeg Primary School Parent council			
Please state your views on the proposal (continue overleaf if necessary)			

I agree, although it's a difficult decision, that Achaleven should be "mothballed" as there has not been any pupils since 2021. However, I would like you to consider that instead of increasing the catchment area for Lochnell the catchment area for Dunbeg primary is increased. Although Lochnell is a great school my reasons and these also reflect the reasons discussed at the Dunbeg Primary parent council AGM are as follows:

- Dunbeg Primary has a great capacity for pupils than Lochnell- I do understand that perhaps the council feel that this capacity may be used by pupils from the new housing development in Dunbeg however our roll call has not increased since this development and as I understand it there are no more houses to be built in the short term.
- School inspection report- "Very good" results for Dunbeg Primary for the recent school inspection report. Given the great result Connel parents may prefer that their children attend Dunbeg.
- Dunbeg primary also offers the same educational, social and wellbeing benefits as Lochnell as supported by the school inspection report.
- Dunbeg primary school is closer to Connel than Lochnell and is on the same side of the bridge.
- From a parent perspective where the parent is employed in Oban dropping off children at Dunbeg is logistically simpler than Lochnell.

Alternatively, could pupils continue to be zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary School.

APPENDIX 4

Achaleven Primary School Public Consultation Meeting

Held in Achaleven Primary School on 4 October 2023 at 6pm

Panel

Yvonne McNeilly, Education Policy Lead Douglas Hendry, Executive Director
Jen Crocket, Chief Education Officer/Head of Education-Wellbeing, Inclusion and Achievement
Wendy Brownlie, Head of Education – Performance and Improvement

In attendance

Graeme McMillan - Transformation Programme Manager
Rachel Binnie – Acting Education Manager Lesley Allan
– Education Scotland

Admin:

Fiona Ferguson – Directorate Support Officer
Laura Blackwood – Directorate Support Officer

3 members of the public

Welcome and introductions were made by Councillor McNeilly.

Mr Hendry then outlined the objective of the meeting, to hear the views of the community, parents and all other stakeholders. He set out the proposal which is being consulted on, that education provision at Achaleven Primary School be discontinued with effect from 31 May 2024 and provided information on the statutory process which the Education Service must follow and the timeline for this.

Ms Crocket and Mrs Brownlie then spoke to a presentation which included:-

- The special considerations as Achaleven is a rural school.
- Information on the pre-consultation stage and the options which were considered by officers.
- How the views of the community, parents and children have been collected.
- The timescale of the consultation process (31 August to 27 October).
- The background to the proposal.
- The national and Council priorities for Education.
- Information on the school roll and projected figures.
- The educational benefits of the proposal.
- Feedback from the pupils who have been involved in the workshops.
- Information on the reasons for placing requests to other schools in the local area.
- The assessed impact of the proposal on a range of factors.

Questions were then invited from the audience.

Audience

Two members of the audience introduced themselves and advised that they have been given notice and to vacate their current business accommodation by March 31 2024. Should the proposal be approved they are interested in using the school building for their business and, if there is a desire from the community, to create a hub for community use.

Panel Response

The Council has no preconceived ideas about the use of the building once this process is completed, and should closure of the school be the ultimate outcome. The Council have in the past have been favourable to community proposals and would be able to pick this up once this process has been completed and the outcome known. Previous buyouts/proposals submitted from communities were referred to.

Audience

If for the any reason the majority of the community would be in favour of our proposal, to create a community hub, would this carry more weight? If this were to make a difference we would make the effort to speak and rally the community, is there merit/value in this?

Is there any scope to bring forward the closing date of the school?

Panel

Yes, if the community were also behind this venture it would carry more weight, however it wouldn't rule out a more commercial approach by your firm/others. A commercial option is not something which could be picked up before a decision were taken on the future of the school. If however, the community were to get in touch we would be able to commence interim discussions about their plans before the process is completed.

The Council would be happy to look at a various options including sale, lease and partnerships.

If you were looking for a short-term solution the Council has property in Oban which could be used as an interim measure.

As this is a rural school closure the timeframe includes a period for call in by Scottish Ministers and therefore the proposed implementation date of 31 May 2024 cannot be altered.

Audience

Has been involved with a small group in looking at getting the school restarted. They were keen to have a pre-school in the area and looked at various funding options, however over the years the

numbers have dwindled and as a group will not object to the current proposal. This was a fantastic school and sad to see it go. Lochnell was given a pre-school this one was not.

Councillor McNeilly thanked everyone for their attendance and expressing their views which will be feed into the consultation process and closed the meeting.

APPENDIX 5



Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School.

November 2023

Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the school; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 4 October 2023 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the site of Lochnell Primary School, Dunbeg Primary School and Oban High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school(s), HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Achaleven

Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

Consultation process

2.1 Argyll and Bute Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 In June 2021, Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. In August 2022, the council agreed to undertake a preliminary consultation and options appraisal required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The council considered four options including the reopening of Achaleven Primary School, continued mothballing with pupils zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary School, and the closure and realignment of the catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School. In August 2023, the council agreed to proceed with the fourth option, to consult on a proposal to permanently discontinue education provision at Achaleven Primary School from 31 May 2024, and to realign the catchment area to Lochnell Primary School.

2.3 The council undertook the consultation between 31 August and 27 October 2023. The proposal notice and a summary was advertised in the local press and sent to relevant consultees. The full proposal document was published on the council website. Argyll and Bute Council held a public meeting at Achaleven Primary School on 4 October 2023. This was attended by three members of the local community, including one parent, and council officials. Most of the discussion focused on the potential future use of the school building if the closure is approved. The council received one response to the online consultation.

2.4 Children attending Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools were also consulted by council officers, including children who live in the Achaleven catchment area. Children were given the opportunity to provide their views. Most children in both primary schools thought it was a good idea to close the Achaleven Primary School. They particularly enjoy the social aspects of being in the larger schools, their school's facilities, and more variety of staff. They suggested several alternative uses for the building if it were to close.

Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council has set out clearly the educational benefits arising from the proposal to close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School. HM Inspectors agree that there may be educational benefits for children. These include participation in a broader range of experiences and opportunities to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of peers. The council has highlighted one negative aspect around additional travel. However, HM Inspectors agree that the positive aspects of the proposal outweigh this negative aspect.

3.2 HM Inspectors met with primary school children and staff, and a few young people in Oban High School who had previously attended Achaleven Primary School. All of these stakeholders

understand why the council is proposing to permanently close the school. The young people that met with HM Inspectors have fond memories of their time at Achaleven Primary School and recall positive learning experiences that prepared them well for secondary school. They would like the primary school to remain open to provide more choice. However, they accept that in the current context reopening the school is not practical. Most primary school children and staff that met with HM Inspectors support the proposal. Children enjoy and benefit from the learning environment and experiences provided in Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools. Both schools have sufficient capacity to meet learners needs.

3.3 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. The council took appropriate steps and due consideration of alternatives before consulting on the proposal to permanently close Achaleven Primary School. The additional travel time resulting from the school closure is relatively short and none of the stakeholders that HM Inspectors met with had any significant concerns about the added journey time. A few stakeholders suggested alternatives to the proposed new catchments. This included that a more natural boundary would be to divide the school catchments at Connel Bridge. While accidents and bridge repairs are not a frequent occurrence, aligning the school catchments at this location could help to mitigate any potential negative impact on school attendance if the bridge is closed. Another suggestion is to realign the full catchment to Dunbeg Primary School, which currently has sufficient capacity to accommodate children from the Achaleven catchment. Should the council decide to permanently close Achaleven Primary School, stakeholders would like the existing building and adjoining grounds to be repurposed for community use.

Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits for children arising from the council's proposal to close Achaleven Primary School. For example, that there maybe more opportunities for them to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of their peers. The proposed alignment to Lochnell Primary School, an alternative alignment to Dunbeg Primary School, or a split between the two schools offers similar educational benefits. The council should consider the alternative views on the school catchment alignment put forward during the consultation before reaching a final decision. The council should also work with the local community, including children and young people, to consider any future use for the school and grounds should the proposal to close be agreed.

HM Inspectors
November 2023

APPENDIX 6

Achaleven Primary School Proposed Closure Pupil Consultation Response

Achaleven catchment children at Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary School will have the opportunity to discuss the proposed school closure and their comments are recorded below.

Lochnell Pupil Consultation 29/09/23

19 children, nearly all children attended Lochnell ELC

8 children knew Achaleven Primary School. A primary 6 child was aware of the proposed closure and meeting because she had seen the poster in her street.

No children had attended Achaleven with all pupils starting in P1 (with the exception of 2 children who had moved into the area and had started Lochnell in a different year group)

Dunbeg Primary School Consultation 02/10/23

8 Pupils, nearly all of the children attended Dunbeg ELC

1 pupil, currently P6, had attended Achaleven prior to mothballing. The other children had attended Dunbeg since Primary 1.

Through the use of a power point children were taken through the reason for the consultation and given the opportunity to give their views.

Children had the opportunity to give a view on Lochnell/Dunbeg and a view on Achaleven as a smaller school.

Very similar views were given by all children recorded below, the important things about being in their larger schools were having friends to play with and making new friends and having more and different staff.

Achaleven	Lochnell/Dunbeg
<p>If too many children went to Achaleven they may not fit in.</p> <p>Would not make as many friends/Would not have as many teachers.</p> <p>Mixed classes would not like to be in a composite, like having own primary.</p> <p>Might not get to play with as many toys.</p> <p>Some people might like smaller schools.</p> <p>If someone didn't want to play with you, you might get lonely.</p> <p>More room in a bigger school</p> <p><i>Pupil who had attended Achaleven is glad she has moved to Dunbeg, having more teachers is better. There is a large garden at Achaleven but it is not like the woodland at Dunbeg.</i></p> <p>Not many staff.</p> <p>Would be ok for those that liked quieter spaces.</p> <p>One child said they would like to go but liked his friends in school and liked to play with his friends so decided he wouldn't move.</p>	<p>Lots of people to play with.</p> <p>Nice, good and welcoming teachers.</p> <p>Lots of teachers, not just one teaching all day.</p> <p>Learn more and new things.</p> <p>Make new friends and like making friends.</p> <p>Lots of books.</p> <p>Good food.</p> <p>Everyone fits in.</p> <p>The school (Lochnell) has 2 football pitches and a basketball pitch. If someone doesn't want to play with another person or that game they can go somewhere else.</p> <p>Dunbeg is getting a new playground.</p>

Children's views on proposed closure
<p>All children in consultation group liked their school, teachers and friends.</p> <p>No child wanted to move school they all wanted to stay in the school they were in (this included child who initially said he would like to go to Achaleven).</p> <p>P5 child didn't know if the school should close but raised a concern if someone could not travel to Lochnell.</p> <p>P1 child felt it should stay open as if their school was closed they would feel sad.</p> <p>1 child said it could be kept open for former pupils to visit.</p> <p>Most pupils in both schools felt it was a good idea to close ('don't think it should be a school') as no-one is going and the money saved could be shared.</p> <p>Achaleven shouldn't be opened as it is next to a main road and children may go on the road.</p> <p>Suggestions for what to do if the school closed: It could be something else: - library, storage, house, church or break apart and turn into a big clock.</p> <p>Wasting money, Achaleven could be sold and money used to buy something else.</p>