

Name of consultation: Badcaul Primary School

Your comments: Badcaul Closure Consultation

Badcaul Primary School has been an integral part of the Dundonnell community for over 120 years. Primary schools are anchors within small rural communities and are indicators of a living community with a future.

The Scottish Government document: 'An action plan to address depopulation' published February 2024 states that 'In Scotland there is a presumption against closure of rural schools', there's good reasons for that. If closed Badcaul Primary School will probably never reopen, no families with young children will come to the area, there will be an inevitable ageing of the demographic leading to terminal population decline in direct contrast to the Scottish Government's stated intent to reverse this decline.

The Highland Council Education Committee report concentrates on the basics of current pupil numbers, perceived lack of support from existing parents and advantages of a bigger school like Ullapool Primary whilst completely ignoring the irreversible effect of closure; the ultimately adverse socio-economic effect on the local area, associated cluster school Scoraig Primary and Ullapool High School and the future cost and logistical issues resulting from no primary provision in Dundonnell.

CURRENT SITUATION

Presently there are 8 children in the area from pre-nursery, through nursery to primary. Section 2 of the report highlights that no parents of current eligible children have indicated support for the school reopening. How were they contacted, what options were put to them? Understandably, in a small community people are reluctant to put themselves in the spotlight. Anecdotally their views appear to be a lot more nuanced. Those of us against the closure cannot reasonably contact the people involved and appear to pressurise them but given the importance of this issue Highland Council could take a more pro-active and creative approach.

The report assesses the educational suitability of the building as C (poor). The building has a large hall suitable for PE and music, as recently as 2017 there were two classrooms, a library, a nursery, an outdoor growing space and a playground with play apparatus; parents were more than happy with the educational suitability.

The forecast school rolls in the report demonstrate why we shouldn't be closing any more feeder schools to UHS. The predicted UHS decline in roll is directly related to all the schools inputting to its roll. If you permanently remove the opportunity for families to move to the Dundonnell area and have their children educated locally the decline of UHS is inevitable. Look at Kinlochbervie if you want to see where this leads.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

The Scottish Government document: 'An action plan to address depopulation' published February 2024 specifically recognises the the problem of declining population in rural areas and

identifies key issues which contribute to this or provide solutions. Education is one of these key factors.

A broad local demographic is key to this. A community with young people, working age people and retired people contributes to a diverse and sustainable community.

Young people are potential employees for existing local employers such as MOWI, the Dundonnell Hotel, local hospitality and proposed mussel farm and local social care.

LOGISTICS AND COSTS

As the report says the building is in good order, the cost of continued mothballing is minimal, the cost of reopening a closed school which may well have been sold off in the interim would be relatively extremely high.

The HC report says 'Highland Council does not consider extending the mothballing would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community' Really? £4,264p/a to keep it mothballed is not a significant cost. Why not hire the hall out for community use in the interim and send a message that the building isn't closed for business.

There are hidden costs resulting from closure not considered in the report. If the statutory nursery provision is going to continue at Ullapool Primary how are pre-school children going to be transported for over an hour with an unsupervised bus change at Braemore Junction? This equally applies to general safeguarding issues for young children and ASN kids.

So called advantages of pupils being in a larger (UPS) school need to be set against the difficulties and risks for very young and /or vulnerable pupils in travelling for an hour with an unsupervised bus changeover. Imaginative collaboration with Scoraig, Ullapool and Baulnaluib which as has been successful in the past needs to be considered in the context of the social and educational 'advantages' (Section 9 Report) offered by a larger school. The wonderful environment where Badcaul is situated also offers daily outdoor activity opportunities which are not available at Ullapool Primary. If these arguments held up to any scrutiny we would close Scoraig now notwithstanding that it's location makes this difficult.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

MOWI are building a hatchery in Ardessie which could employ up to 15 people some of whom may have young children. Rather than bussing the employees in or bussing their children out, why not facilitate a sustainable community locally.

It's already been successful in the recent past but working with Scoraig Primary can secure mutual sustainability for primary education along Little Loch Broom.

There is currently an initiative (registered with the Rural and Island Housing Fund) to develop affordable housing in Dundonnell close to the school. The whole point in this kind of initiative relates to the issues in the The Scottish Government document: 'An action plan to address depopulation' where housing is also identified as a key factor. There will be no point in delivering new affordable housing which could potentially welcome young people with children to the area

if there is no school for those children to go to therefore leading again to inevitable population decline and dying rural communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is still too early to take a decision on the closure of Badcaul Primary when there are still so many variables at play and communities across the North West Highlands are making a concerted effort to arrest population decline. The school can easily maintain its mothballed status at minimal cost whilst the situation develops. If the school is permanently closed there will be no way back and the community will shrink to being a hospitality stop off on the NC500.

Upload documents or letters :

I am commenting as: Local resident

I am commenting on behalf of: I am a Community Councillor, parent of three former pupils and recently chair of UHS Parent Council for 6 years

Name:

Title	First name	Last name
Mr	Seori	Burnett

Address:

postcode_search	Choose address	Did you find the address on the list above?
IV232QP	12 Badralloch, Dundonnell, IV23 2QP	Yes