



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE THE ACCOMMODATION AT STRONTIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following conclusion of the Statutory Consultation for improving the current accommodation at Strontian Primary School (SPS).

In summary, options explored within the original proposal paper considered by the 21st May 2014 Education, Children and Adult Services (ECAS) Committee were as follows:

- Option 1 - a significant upgrade to the existing SPS building addressing the weaknesses in the existing ancillary accommodation and playground area;
- Option 2 - provide the appropriate Pre-school and Primary-age classroom, ancillary rooms and safe and secure play space adjacent to and within the AHS building;
- Option 3 - purchase land at the front of the Ardnamurchan High School (AHS) and place modular accommodation there, comprising two classrooms, the appropriate office accommodation and the creation of an appropriate and proportionate play area.

The proposal paper commencing the Statutory Consultation process was based upon the following recommendation:

- Place a single classroom modular accommodation with office accommodation adjacent to the existing community/nursery wing of Ardnamurchan High School;
- Convert the existing Pre-school/mother and toddler accommodation within Ardnamurchan High School into a Primary classroom and Pre-school accommodation;
- Create an appropriate safe and secure play area for the Primary-age and Preschool pupils adjacent to this wing.

ECAS Committee in November 2014 received a final proposal report at that time, but deferred consideration of the report based on further local representations made.

This final proposal report is produced, having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any persons) at the public meeting held in Strontian Village Hall on 9th June 2014.
- The report from Education Scotland.
- Representations received in November 2014, when it was first proposed to submit a final report to Committee.
- Subsequent discussions with Strontian Community School Building Ltd, a community benefit company society set up to progress the option most favoured by the community.

The recommendation contained within this report is to recommend the re-location of Strontian Primary School, to a new build on land close to Ardnamurchan High School, with that re-location dependent on the community proposal to own, fund and develop the facility as outlined within this report, with that facility then being utilised by the Council for the provision of schooling for the Strontian Primary catchment. The recommendation therefore represents a variation to Option 3 contained within the original Proposal Paper.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 - The proposal document

Appendix 2 - Minute of public meeting held in Strontian Village Hall on the 9th June 2014.

Appendix 3 - Minute of the meeting held in Strontian Village Hall on 30th June 2014.

Appendix 4 - Written Submissions Received

Appendix 5 - Report from Education Scotland

Appendix 6 - Further Representations after Nov 2014

Appendix 7 – Financial Analysis

1.0 Background

1.1 The Education, Children and Adult Services Committee (ECAS) at its meeting on 21 May 2014 agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on options to improve the current accommodation at Strontian Primary School.

1.2 **Appendix 1** is the original proposal document and provides full details of the original proposal, which presented 3 options for consideration.

1.3 A Consultation Report was published in October 2014, with a view to approval at the November 2014 ECAS Committee. That Report recommended the Council adopt a variation to the original option 3, which had proposed purchasing land in front of Ardnamurchan High School and place modular accommodation there, comprising two classrooms, the appropriate office accommodation, and the creation of an appropriate and proportionate play area. The variation involved moving the site to the other side of the road from that originally proposed.

1.4 Following publication of the Consultation Report, parents and local residents made continuing representations. In the light of these representations the Committee decided, in November 2014, to defer consideration of the Report. Since that date there has been considerable further local consultation with the community with regards to solutions to improve the accommodation for Strontian Primary.

1.5 Full details of the process can be found below.

2.0 Consultation process

2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Friday 23 May 2014 to Friday 11 July 2014 and written representations on the proposal were sought

from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending Strontian Primary School, including pre-school pupils, and parents of pupils attending Ardnamurchan High School
- (ii) All pupils attending Ardnamurchan High School and all P4-7 pupils attending Strontian Primary School
- (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal
- (iv) The Parent Councils of Ardnamurchan High School and Strontian Primary School
- (v) Staff of Ardnamurchan High School and Strontian Primary School;
- (vi) Trade union representatives
- (vii) The community councils for the areas covered by Strontian Primary School and Ardnamurchan High School
- (viii) Education Scotland
- (ix) Local Youth Forum.

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised in the local press and on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held in Strontian Village Hall on the 9th June 2014. This meeting was advertised in advance in the local press and on the Highland Council website. The Minute of that meeting is appended – **Appendix 2**. A further meeting was subsequently held on 30 June. The minute of that meeting is at **Appendix 3**.

3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at public meetings held during the consultation period, officials reviewed the proposals.

4.0 Responses received

4.1 15 written submissions were received during the consultation period. Details of these submissions are appended – **Appendix 4A – 4P**.

5.0 Issues raised during the consultation period

5.1 The issues identified during the consultation period are summarised below.

- i. The Table of Benefits submitted as part of the original consultation is misleading, and shows alleged benefits for one option that have no basis in evidence.

- ii. There was a lack of transparency about the process at which the options were arrived at.
- iii. The option favoured by Highland Council is not supported by the parent body.
- iv. The area suggested for development as a playground under Option 2 is boggy and shaded by buildings and high ground on 3 sides. It is unsuitable for the suggested purpose.
- v. The community facilities within Àrainn Shuaineirt/The Sunart Centre operate very successfully and should not be put at risk by moving the primary school into the Centre. Local people are particularly respectful of the position of the Mother and Toddler Group.
- vi. Àrainn Shuaineirt/The Sunart Centre has created a unique “Ardnamurchan” identity which must be preserved. The existing facilities within the Centre must be protected.
- vii. Ardnamurchan High School and Àrainn Shuaineirt were built for the wider community of the Peninsula, and this should be taken into account in any proposals to relocate Strontian Primary.
- viii. Option 2 identified job losses for local people and this is a concern for the community.
- ix. Highland Council proposes that Option 3 is located on the same side of the road as the Fire Station, requiring pupils to cross the road to access the facilities that would be shared with the High School. There is development land on the opposite side of the road and there should be an Option to relocate the school there.
- x. The disruption involved with Option1 would have a significant educational impact.
- xi. Children in Strontian have the right to be educated within high quality facilities, similar as exist elsewhere on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula.
- xii. Under Option 1, it may not be necessary to retain the section of road in front of the current school as a 'through' route, as access to Dail Mhor House and the surgery could be gained from either direction. In this way the stretch of road in front of the school could simply be removed completely and become part of the school grounds.

- xiii. Flat roofs are indicated for the extension areas in Option 1. These are aesthetically poor, do not perform well in Highland weather, and miss an opportunity to use the roof space e.g. for additional storage. Pitched roofs should be considered instead.
- xiv. A permanent building would be the best option as it is not more expensive in terms of initial cost, and represents better value long-term as it will not depreciate to same extent as modular units (indeed, property can be expected to appreciate in value rather than depreciate), it would provide greater design flexibility allowing the construction of a form of building which better reflects its surroundings; and a permanent building does not rule out future incorporation into AHS in 2027 (when the current PPP contract ends), if desired. If it is decided to stay as is, no costs are incurred, but on the other hand if it is preferred to move into AHS the investment required for the modifications required will be offset by the existing permanent building being of greater value than modular units, when sold or transferred to another user.
- xv. The inclusion of a new dedicated primary school car park for Option 3 or “Option 4” is an unnecessary expense. If the new school is sited as close to the main AHS building as the PPP 'red line' permits, access should be straightforward via the existing parking arrangements, as also used by the nursery.
- xvi. The current orientation & layout does not maximise natural daylight for the children. Both classrooms should have at least some southerly aspect to them.

5.2 The Highland Council’s responses to the issues raised are as follows:

Issues i-vii - All of the above comments were made in response to the preferred option set out in the original proposal paper, under which one of the classrooms of Strontian Primary School would be located within the current accommodation of Àrainn Shuaineirt/The Sunart Centre. The Council’s response to these matters was detailed within the report published in October 2014. Following further public consultation, Highland Council officials no longer intend to recommend this option to Committee.

Issue viii - The option now being recommended does not involve job losses.

Issue ix – The proposal now being developed by the community, and which the Council is recommending, is based on a revised location, addressing these concerns.

Issue x – Highland Council agrees that there could potentially be disruption associated with construction and improvement works within an operational

school, though the Council has successfully managed such challenges in other school projects.

Issue xi - One of the aims of Highland Council's Sustainable School Estate Review is that pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability. The proposal aims to achieve that outcome.

Issue xii and xiii- Although the stopping up of the section of road in question would be possible, it would need to be subject to a statutory order, which might well attract objections. In addition, it is likely that any such order would result in considerable infrastructure costs, arising particularly from a need to upgrade the route in front of Burnside Cottages and the Telephone Exchange.

The plans for the extension to the existing school were designed to make the extension compatible with the existing design. They involved pitched roofs for the majority of the extension but incorporate flat roofs for the connecting corridors. This is in keeping with the main part of the existing primary school building.

This option is not however being recommended.

Issue xiv – The Option now being recommended would allow for a permanent building, whilst also providing the flexibility for future change.

Issue xv - Agreed, although parking arrangements will be subject to planning permission.

Issue xvi - This would be an issue for the detailed design process.

6.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

6.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland were invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 5**.

6.2 The report from Education Scotland identified further issues for consideration by the Council. These are detailed below:

xvii. Parent Council representatives and staff expressed frustration about the lack of detail available regarding the proposed design layout and timescale for the development. They were not aware of the most up to date proposal. All Parent Council representatives and staff did not favour a modular building, and were more in favour of an eco-friendly, traditional build approach.

xviii. A number of stakeholders including Parent Councils, school staff and members of the Sunart Community Company

raised concerns about future access to a village hall in the event of the school being relocated. The council needs to engage with a range of community partners to manage their concerns, when considering options about the future operation of Strontian Village Hall.

- xix. The Council needs to put in place safe and secure access between the primary school, nursery and high school buildings, including provision for inclement weather.
- xx. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to engage parents, staff, children, young people and the wider community in discussions about the finalised design and layout of the new school.

6.2 The Highland Council's responses to the issues raised by Education Scotland are as follows:

Issue xvii - Under the option being recommended, community representatives will be the ones leading on design, with appropriate input from the Council.

Issue xviii - Highland Council will work with the local community over any proposals related to the asset, and provide advice and information as appropriate. Were there to be community interest, a business case would require to be drawn up for presentation to the Highland Council's Asset Management Project Board, who consider and make recommendations to Committee on such matters in line with policy.

Issue xix - The Highland Council is sympathetic to the need to provide safe and secure access between the primary and high schools in inclement weather. We are unable to breach the boundary of the PPP site for legal and financial reasons, and any provision for access will be restricted by this factor.

Issue xx – Throughout the consultation process the Council has sought to engage with the community and has gone further than the consultation requirements set down in legislation. In particular, since November 2014 the Council was worked very closely with community representatives, to progress a solution that has the support of the community.

7.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

7.1 A number of alleged omissions and inaccuracies were raised during the consultation period. These are detailed below.

- xxi. Ardnamurchan High School was designed for 250 pupils, not 318.
- xxii. Option 1 as described in the existing paperwork would not extend the playground, despite the assertion made there that

it would. This is a key concern for parents. We recognise new options for this are under consideration, but they are not currently included in this paper.

- xxiii. The financial table attached as Appendix 7 to the original proposals, had mixed up Options 2 and 3.
- xxiv. A major issue with the existing paperwork is the omission of Option 4 (and variants), which is now considered by all to be one of the front-runners.

7.2 Highland Council's response to the alleged inaccuracies and omissions is as follows:

Issue xxi - Highland Council has assessed Ardnamurchan High School as having capacity for 318 pupils and this figure is recorded in returns to the Scottish Government.

Issue xxii - Option 1 is not being recommended.

Issue xxiii - The comment above is correct. A revised financial table is attached at **Appendix 7/7A**.

Issue xxiv – The Option now being recommended is a variant to the Option 3 identified in the Proposal Paper, and has been the subject of extensive discussion between the Council and the local community.

8.0 Response to Issues Raised in Sections 5, 6 and 7

8.1 Following the original consultation exercise, a report was published on 21 October, recommending the adoption of the variation to Option 3. It includes the Council's original responses to the issues raised in consultation.

9.0 Further Representations in November 2014

9.1 Following the publication of the report, an informal meeting was held with parents on 4 November 2014, which led to the submission of a number of further representations, expressing opposition to the Council's recommendation. Copies of these representations are at **Appendix 6**.

9.2 The issues raised in the further representations are summarised below.

- xxv. Parents overwhelmingly reject the proposal advanced by The Highland Council, which would force the school and community into moving into the High School accommodation in 12 years' time, and is thus the least flexible of the options provided.

- xxvi. Strontian Primary will lose its identity if it is forced to move into the High School.
 - xxvii. The proposal reflects a current fashion for 3-18 campuses, which may have changed in 12 years' time. If so, the Council will be back to square one and will be forced to spend another large sum of capital on upgrading the school.
 - xxviii. The proposed design is much too small.
 - xxix. The proposal is based on assumptions about falling school rolls. The Council should instead be looking at ways to support and sustain this rural community.
- 9.4 In light of the representations received, the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee of Highland Council decided to defer a decision.
- 9.5 Following the deferment, and following a number of further local meetings with the community, and further engagement between the community and a housing trust, local community representatives proposed a solution under which they developed and built a new facility, to be leased to the Council for use as a primary school. A community benefit company was formed and has been in discussion with the Council regarding the proposal.

10.0 Review of Options

- 10.1 The statutory consultation exercise revealed general opposition amongst parents to the original options proposed by the Council.
- 10.2 After reviewing the consultation responses, Highland Council does not propose to continue with either Option 1 (refurbishment of Strontian Primary on its current site), or Option 2 (relocating part of the school into Àrainn Shuaineirt/The Sunart Centre) from the original proposal paper.
- 10.3 The proposals outlined by the Council as Option 3 (and its variants), to re-locate the Primary School to a new build on land adjacent to the High School, while receiving some broad support in principle, were not supported specifically through the consultation insofar as the size and design was not deemed to meet community need. The Council has however re-stated in its consultation that the size, design and cost is appropriate to the needs of a school of that size.
- 10.4 As set out above, a variant on Option 3 has emerged through the more recent dialogue with the community through the Statutory Consultation process, for which there is now broad support within the community.

- 10.5 The proposal for a community led project represents an innovative solution, whereby the local community will fund, develop and own a new community facility which will then be leased to the Council, for Strontian Primary School. The basic footprint and structure of the facility is based around that for 3 terraced houses, to provide flexibility in relation to future use, and to deliver an affordable solution.
- 10.6 The proposal offers a facility which will deliver both community and educational benefits. Children attending Strontian Primary will be able to move from the current school building, in which much of the school's ancillary accommodation (office, playground and dining space) is cramped and unsuitable. The community will own an asset which can provide an income stream and long-term benefit to the community. They can have greater scope to influence the scope of the school facility, and its community uses. Medium to long-term, should the Council wish to consider a further re-location of the Primary School, e.g. to within the High School, the community could convert their asset to housing or other community use, maintaining an income stream and community benefit.
- 10.9 The proposal also represents a more affordable and flexible proposition than the Council undertaking to deliver a school of similar size and scope in a traditional capital manner (which would exceed the cost of the Council's option 3 and its variants). The proposal represents a solution for the medium term, giving the potential for the Council to review arrangements at some point in the future with the Primary potentially co-locating within the Ardnamurchan High School campus. Any future re-location would be subject to a new Statutory Consultation, and may be dependent on scope to make change to the High School campus within the confines of the PPP contract, or on the end of that contract in 2027.
- 10.10 The Highland Council's estimate of the capital and revenue costs for the proposal is set out at **Appendix 7 and 7A**. For commercial reasons, land purchase costs have not been shown.
- 10.11 Should the proposal be approved, discussions and negotiations with the community would continue, in order to confirm full project funding is in place, finalise lease terms and sign off on the school brief and design.

11.0 Legal issues

- 11.1 The Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.
- 11.2 As provided for in section 1 of the 1980 Act it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of

the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). That said, as with all Council duties, the Council has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). In coming to any decision the above factors should be taken into account.

12.0 Conclusion

- 12.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed above.
- 15.2 Education Scotland staff visited Strontian Primary School to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.
- 15.3 The Director of Care and Learning, on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the revised proposal offers the prospect of educational and community benefits and has the support of the local community.

13.0 Recommendation

- 13.1 It is therefore recommended that Strontian Primary School is relocated to a new build on land close to Ardnamurchan High School, with that re-location dependent on the community proposal to own, fund and develop the facility as outlined within this report.

Bill Alexander

Director of Care and Learning

28 July 2016