



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT BADCAUL PRIMARY SCHOOL, RE-ASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF ULLAPOOL PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Badcaul Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Ullapool Primary School.

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 person) at the public meeting held at Badcaul Church of Scotland on 10 September 2024
- The report from Education Scotland.

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

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 30 May 2024, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Badcaul Primary School, re-assigning its catchment to that of Ullapool Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - D** are the appendices to the original proposal.

- 1.3 Badcaul Primary School has been mothballed since January 2022, when the remaining pupils transferred to Ullapool Primary School.
- 1.4 Having once again reviewed the status of Badcaul Primary, it is the Council's view that there is an insufficient number of children of suitable age in the Badcaul catchment, who wish to attend Badcaul Primary School, and that consequently the school is no longer viable. Further details on this are provided in Sections 6 and 10 below.
- 1.5 Badcaul Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has had special regard to:
- any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 6-10 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and have been reconsidered in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5-10 below.
 - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix A**) and is further considered at Sections 6, 8 and 10 below, in the light of representations received during consultation.
 - the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
 - the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact. The effects on school transport were considered at Section 11 of the Proposal Paper, (**Appendix A**) and reconsidered in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 6 and 10 below.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 26 August 2024 to Friday 11 October 2024. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:
- (i) Parents/carers of pupils attending Ullapool Primary School; including parents/carers of pre-school pupils.
 - (ii) The Parent Councils of Ullapool Primary School, Ullapool High School, Bualnaluib Primary School, Scoraig Primary School, and Gairloch High School.
 - (iii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
 - (iv) Staff of Ullapool Primary School
 - (v) Lochbroom Community Council
 - (vi) Aultbea Community Council
 - (vii) Trade Union representatives.

- 2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.
- 2.4 A public meeting was held at Badcaul Church of Scotland on 10 September 2024. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website, X Account and Facebook page, and in the *Ross-shire Journal* and the *Ullapool News*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

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 the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.
- 3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.
- 3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

4.0 Responses

- 4.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 14 written responses (not including the pupil questionnaires). Copies of the responses can be found at Appendices 3i-3xiv.
- 4.2 The views of pupils of a suitable age at Ullapool Primary School (which included the pupils living within the Badcaul catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire. Appendix 3xv-3xvi summarises their views, which are also discussed at Section 5 below.

5.0 Overview of Issues raised during the consultation period

- 5.1 There were 24 written responses from pupils of Ullapool Primary. Fourteen of the pupils who responded thought Badcaul should be permanently closed. Six others thought mothballing should continue and four that Badcaul Primary should re-open. The detailed comments from pupils can be viewed at Appendix 3xv and 3xvi.
- 5.2 HM Inspectors visited Ullapool Primary School and Ullapool High School and had discussions with parents, staff and children. There were mixed views about the proposal, but overall, parents and children were mostly in favour. Children attending Ullapool Primary School enjoy their learning and feel that they have a positive experience with lots of opportunities. However, they expressed sadness at the loss of a village school.
- 5.3 The arguments advanced by the pupils in favour of re-opening the school, are set out at Issues 1-3 below, together with arguments put forward in support of closure.

- 5.4 There were 16 written responses received from other stakeholders. One of the respondents added further information after the end of the consultation period. All the respondents opposed the proposed closure due to the effect on the community, and suggested the school should continue to be mothballed. Only one of the responses came from a parent of primary age children from within the catchment. One other response came from a parent with a pre-school child, who plans to move to the area in 2026 and whose child would be eligible for P1 in 2028 (a further response was submitted by a grandparent of the same child).
- 5.5 The public meeting was reasonably well-attended, given the small size of the local community. Once again though there were no parents of primary age or pre-school children in attendance. Amongst those who were there, there was an acceptance that the school could not realistically re-open at present, but also a desire to see a continuation of mothballing, to allow more time for the new families to move into the area.
- 5.6 The main arguments put forward are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Where different responses raise similar issues, these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised in Public Consultation

- 6.1 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of re-opening are set out at Issues 1-3 below, and addressed at Responses 1-3.

Issue 1

Badcaul is a good school. I would like to go back.

Response 1

Badcaul was a good school, but the Council don't think there are enough children in the area to keep a school going.

Issue 2

Some families may not have time to get to Ullapool.

The school should re-open so families don't have to drive or get the bus with no parents.

Response 2

The Council provides a bus for children of school age to travel to Ullapool, although it's true children have to get the bus without parents travelling with them.

Issue 3

Opening Badcaul again would encourage more people to the area.

Response 3

The Council doesn't think enough people will come to make a difference to the school.

- 6.2 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of continuing to mothball Badcaul Primary School are set out at Issue 4 below, and addressed at Response 4.

Issue 4

New families might want to stay in Badcaul and going on the bus every day will be really hard.

We might get more families.

If you close the school it will be a very long journey for little ones.

Response 4

It is a long journey for infants, but there just aren't enough children in the area, and we don't think there will be in future.

- 6.3 Arguments advanced by the children in favour of closing Badcaul Primary School are set out at Issue 5 below, and addressed at Response 5.

Issue 5

It would be good for Ullapool Primary to get more children and more staff.

You can make more friends.

It's nice to have more friends.

There would be more friends to play football with.

There are not many kids in the area and a lot of old people.

People in Badcaul have to come to Ullapool for High School. They could get used to the journey and get to know the friends they will have in High School.

Response 5

The Council agrees with these comments.

- 6.4 The arguments advanced in written responses are set out at Issues 6-14 below and addressed at Responses 6-14. Where different responses raise similar concerns, these have, to an extent, been combined as a single issue.

6.5 In general, the written response also accept that the school could not realistically re-open at present, but argue for a continuation of mothballing, to allow more time for the new families to move into the area. The main arguments against permanent closure can be summarised as follows:

- The permanent closure of the school would be a disincentive for families to move to the area.
- The lack of families would have a negative effect on the community, leaving it mainly inhabited by retired people.
- A new fish farm is being constructed, and there are plans for affordable housing for the area, which may lead to new families moving in
- Closure would also have a knock-on effect to Scoraig Primary, as the two schools formerly had close links.
- The travel distances to and from Ullapool are too long for primary school children, and the route is vulnerable to winter weather.
- Closure would lead to minimal financial saving to the authority.

Issue 6

I am in the process of submitting an application for my daughter to start primary school in Wester Ross. We have planned to move up to Dundonnell summer of 2026. We would be looking at a place for our daughter (aged 3 in October) at Badcaul primary school, as this would be our 1st choice. We are keen for her to start her education here as we have heard a lot of positive reviews. I, myself, attended Ullapool high school before moving to the west midlands, but we plan to return to the highlands in 2026.

Response 6

We welcome new families moving to the Highlands. However the Council has proposed the closure of Badcaul Primary School on the basis that the school is no longer viable. Unfortunately, the addition of one child in 2026 will not alter that position.

Issue 7 – Effect on the community

Badcaul School should be kept open. This is a very rural area and the community needs the school as more and more people are moving to the area. Closing this school goes against all that the SNP promised rural areas. Very sad.

It is exceptionally short sighted to close this school. As it stands there is already a parent group investigating childcare options in the area yet what impetus will come when the children have no prospect of schooling?

To future proof the resilience of this community it is essential to keep the facility open this is an area that is affected by snow storms in winter and can often be cut off.

The impact of closing the school will see fewer and fewer families willing to move to Little Loch Broom due to lack of services or distance.

The Scottish Government has policies to guard against pupil deprivation and lack of access to services is a form of rural deprivation.

Instead of adopting the default position to close a school that is dwindling why not work with those in the community looking to grow a childcare facility and look at routes to provide wrap around school and nursery care.

Furthermore please consider the reasons why recruitment of teachers is problematic. If there is very little housing available then it becomes a problem. If the school were remodelled and updated to include a family house for a teacher that was tied to the job this may change things.

<https://www.gov.scot/news/affordable-housing-initiative-for-key-workers/>

The closure of this school would have a knock on effect on Scoraig, on Ullapool High and on the provision of services for families nearby as it will see the doctor surgery close and regular public transport also close.

A school is the heart of any community and this one could be turned around if plans to reverse this decision were made concrete because this will deliver a critical hammer blow to rural depopulation in Wester Ross.

Permanently closing Badcaul Primary School would be detrimental to the area of Dundonnell. It is the hub of the community and very sorely missed. Having no school in an area does not attract young families into the area which is so needed here.

Response 7

There is no clear evidence to support the suggestion that the closure of a village school leads to a decline in local population. The Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, which reported in 2014, noted that the existence of a school is not always a prerequisite for a community to exist or thrive, and that there is a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities. It should be noted that Badcaul Primary was first mothballed precisely as a result of a decline in the number of children attending, despite the presence of a local school.

School enrolments in Highland are in decline generally. Since 2018 the annual total number of primary school children in Highland has been:

2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
17349	17301	16835	16714	16572	16187	15895

As can be seen, the number has dropped each year, and this pattern is expected to continue for the next few years at least. Sadly, this has inevitable repercussions for our primary schools.

Providing additional school-related housing in rural areas raises significant challenges. Over time, our authority has strategically reduced its involvement due to high maintenance costs, reduced demand in certain regions, and tax implications for staff occupying housing for extended periods. Vacant properties have also posed financial and logistical burdens without effectively addressing broader housing needs.

Rural communities undoubtedly face housing pressures, often exacerbated by factors such as second-home ownership. However, The Highland Council has previously encountered difficulties in managing the evolving demands of education-linked housing. By collaborating with housing teams or private developers, we can better support tailored solutions that align with community needs while ensuring our resources remain focused on educational priorities. This approach ensures long-term viability without diverting essential resources from education.

It is acknowledged that the travel time from Badcaul to Ullapool is unusually long for primary school children. However, it was local parents themselves who decided to move their children to Ullapool. The fundamental issue is a lack of demand for children to attend Badcaul Primary.

Whilst the school itself has been mothballed since January 2022, the primary school Early Learning Centre (ELC) has been inactive since August 2018 and there have been no enquiries since then about ELC, childcare or school age childcare.

There are currently no children of ELC age in the Badcaul school catchment area, although we are aware of two children who will be eligible for ELC in the coming years. An ELC experience for a lone child would exclude the child's opportunities for play and socialisation with their peers. By attending an ELC with greater numbers locally, children from remote and rural locations benefit immensely from mixing with other children and will therefore be more prepared and better equipped when it comes to starting school.

There was a school age childcare service in Ullapool provided by the Care and Learning Alliance, however, it closed due to reduced numbers attending after the Covid pandemic, affecting sustainability and efforts to re-establish it proved difficult, as they were not able to recruit sufficient staff.

Issue 8

For various reasons some Dundonnell residents are upset about the proposed closure of Badcaul Primary School. Not least of these reasons is the journey distance to and from the alternative primary school in Ullapool. For young children travelling that distance on a daily term time basis is a considerable undertaking.

However, residents have had to acknowledge - however reluctantly - that the current reality of so few youngsters now living in Dundonnell makes it financially untenable for the Highland Council to keep the school open.

Residents having recognised that fact, I wonder if there may be an outside chance that, if in the interim an alternative community use of the school side of the building (not including the residential side) can be made and run by the community (having negotiated tenure on a rental basis) there might be a possibility that one day the school section could be returned into the possession of the Highland Council to be reactivated as a school, should the Dundonnell population once again include young families.

The Highland Small Communities Housing Trust could be approached to ascertain if they would be interested in not only building two houses in the spacious playground area but also making the school house available as a viable residential property. Hopefully a realistic option for them because their expenditure would be greatly lessened by the fact that access, electricity, water, sewerage, a large parking area and even fibre optic high speed broadband are already in place.

The school – inclusive of hall, toilets, classrooms, small office and kitchen - would be a valuable resource for a community trust to operate. They could offer the facilities for a variety of uses: meetings; classes; activities; craft sessions; craft markets; exhibitions; talks etc. All of which happenings would have to raise money towards rental from the HC, insurance and maintenance. Plus for the services of someone willing to be a caretaker. A tall order but, with enough commitment, perhaps a possibility!

Obviously, the child sized toilets would have to be altered for adult usage (although there is already one standard toilet in place) and wheelchair access would have to be installed. There is already a substantial pot of money lying dormant - collected many years ago by community members for the intention of creating a building for the above mentioned usage. That money could, hopefully, be utilised if the school is acquired for local use and if there is community agreement.

That erstwhile community group – known as DACE (Dundonnell Area Community Enterprise) disbanded and the funds that were raised have not been used.

I am an elderly resident who has lived in Dundonnell since the nineties. The area was thriving back then. It would be so uplifting to see it even partially regenerated because now it is dying.

Response 8

If Badcaul Primary is closed on a permanent basis, it is highly unlikely that a school would ever open again in the community. The only prospect of reactivating the school would be via continued mothballing.

The Council believes that the low number of children in the area mean that the school is no longer viable, and there is no prospect of becoming viable in the foreseeable future.

If the school is closed, the community could advance proposals for utilising the building, including in any of the ways suggested.

Issue 9

I was sorry not to make the consultation meeting in September.

I see in the Ross-shire journal Emma Roddick's comments about the impact of affordable housing on rural communities. It is my understanding there are proposals to seek funding for affordable housing in Dundonnell/Badcaul area. If the school were to close it would mean the end of any chance of young families (with the obvious financial constraints that mean they would need to apply for affordable housing) being able to move there. Placing Badcaul in the Ullapool catchment would mean the need for 2 vehicles per household one for the dropping off and collection of children as well as another for the person going to work tradespeople most likely. Also the road over the Feign is treacherous in winter with many fearing driving conditions just doing the journey once let alone twice a day when weather is bad.

I would urge that the process of closure is reconsidered until plans for affordable housing in the area is fully explored giving the chance of 'halting rural depopulation'.

Scoraig has recently seen an increase in young families as a result of plans to make land affordable to them (ongoing) and I think that the same would be true in Badcaul if plans for affordable housing were realised.

Rural communities are in trouble and this latest school to highlight that is Badcaul.

This used to be one of the schools I visited as part of my job, as was Kinlochewe, both moth-balled in the last couple of years. The schools get so small that the parents start to worry about the kids experience and take them to a bigger school (I understand why) The schools then drift towards an unsustainable number and then close. Meanwhile, many of the houses big enough to house families with children are being bought up by retirees or as second homes or holiday lets. The communities become a monoculture in demographic terms.

In the meantime, this community is putting in motion new (more) affordable housing for people but the pace of this can't keep up with the school closures. This results in a community with a little bit of affordable housing but no school and therefore a lack of desire for families to move there. It's a nail in the coffin

of rural communities. It creates retirement/holiday villages where there is no one to run the services in aging populations where care is required.

It makes me so sad and needs major political and systematic change.

This is not a simple case of please don't close another rural school. It is a plea to see there are other major factors at play and that is the housing situation.

Please give this school a chance to stay open at least until the community's efforts to build more housing for families can change its course.

Aside from permanently ruining a rural community, the way to Ullapool is a dangerous section of road, often difficult in winter.

Response 9

In the event the school closed, the Council would provide transport to Ullapool for any children in the P1-7 age group.

There is no evidence that the number of young children in the area will increase to the point when the school can again become viable.

Issue 10

The temporary closure of the school is already having a negative impact on the local community. In my view this proposal is premature and no full risk assessment has been undertaken of the impacts. There are good prospects for the development of housing and employment in the catchment area—unlike Ullapool, which could benefit Ullapool High School, albeit in a modest way. Extension of the mothballing seems prudent and would provide flexibility for the future and community resilience.

Process

The public meeting on 10th September was conducted in a transparent way and the Highland Council (HC) staff and HC member enabled a frank and open discussion. However, it is of some concern to me that this meeting was organised somewhat late in the official process. I know that Hall was booked in some secrecy many weeks before. I appreciate Loch Broom Community Council had been briefed at an earlier stage, but their focus is Ullapool in my experience (as an ex-Member). However it was reassuring that the meeting was well-attended by a range of local people and interests, with experience of other school mothballing, local conditions and school and transport issues. Many of the points I make below I picked up from others at the meeting though I have amplified these in some cases.

Current and medium-term situation

It was somewhat of a shock when the school was shut in January 2022, but obviously when there are no children, there was no alternative. However, now there are three potential nursery age children in the catchment area. Two more primary age children are currently being home-schooled. The Dundonnell estate has made housing land available and this is being progressed by the Rural and Islands Housing Fund. Sadly, lack of finance is slowing this proposal down but a positive move on the extension of mothballing could mean, houses for young families (and single young people) could be planned and built rather than sheltered housing- residents of which will need care workers etc. Also the increasing tourist stock of former homes and new pods is running into constraints due to a lack of staff for cleaning and catering. Badcaul is at the centre of a strategic network of roads, down to Gairloch, Inverness and Ullapool and beyond. It's not at the end of a single track road. The NC 500 runs straight through. Dundonnell is rich in resources. Currently MOWI are building a fish hatchery, to extend their fish farming activities with I understand 16 jobs to be created. There is prawn and lobster fishing in the loch, oyster farming being developed and mussel growing being explored. The situation can change very quickly.

Risk Assessment

The Educational Benefits statement is of course focussed on the education dimensions and not the implications for the local community. The school was the centre for a range of activities including fund raising soup lunches and its loss is felt keenly. However Highland Council and the Scottish Government have a broader remit which hopefully they will bring to bear on their assessment.

But there are some issues regarding educational benefits which were picked up at the meeting, particularly on transport. The report is misleading in using Google maps driving times to Ullapool (see para 11.3) of 41 minutes. This ignores delays in summer due to the ever-congested NC 500 on A 832 and A 835, and in winter with ice and snow on the high Fain stretch in particular. Moreover currently pupils have to change buses at Braemore junction, which for young children and special needs pupils is not great to say the least. Additionally, it cannot be assumed there will be willing school bus drivers in the medium term.

The assessment does not consider the adverse effect on Scoraig school which used to work closely with Badcaul school, enabling some working in an age-appropriate peer group. (Our household helped with joint environmental education with the schools). Apparently now Scoraig pupils have to get to Ullapool which is much more difficult. (Boat trip and extended road transport). When Badcaul school was open, many opportunities on music and sport were made available to pupils.

Other aspects.

It is noted in the report that the school buildings are in good condition so obviously an extended mothballing will not be very costly. Also they currently provide an IT link to Scoraig and Achiltibuie schools. It is expected this will not be necessary in 2025, however if you are waiting for BT provision via the R100 scheme, please note we have been waiting 8 years already for this.

Much is made of the very remote rural schools classification, as if that is a negative designation. We have been living here for 12 years, when Badcaul school was functioning. We knew the children who went there, in this time and have been very impressed by their independent outlooks and very varied career outcomes. Also some would like to return, for their future lives. (Sadly our direct contributions have been support to school events and functions, not pupils.)

Mothballing does have a negative impact - families have withdrawn from house purchases due to the lack of a school. Also when hopefully the mothballing will be extended it will be vital to make this as a positive statement about future life in the Dundonnell. On mothballing in January 2022 the HC published a rather negative report in the Ullapool News, our local newspaper about school closure as if it only had a very rich history and that closure was definitely permanent.

It is very unlikely that the school building would have a future community use, if shut. We already have one church building which is likely to be sold, currently used as a community room (where the school meeting was held).

Point 13.3 states due to a radio link for IT services at Scoraig and Achiltibuie being housed in Badcaul that the building will be maintained until December 2025. So why can the school not remain mothballed until at least then. In addition to the educational needs of children living in the area now and in the future the impact of a school closure on a local community and the depopulation of an area should be considered.

Response 10

The comments about future population growth have been noted and addressed elsewhere.

The public consultation was approved by the Council's Education Committee on 1 June 2024, but the consultation itself did not begin until late August. It was a conscious decision to avoid the school summer holidays when parents of young children might be away from the area. The Church was provisionally booked as a venue prior to the Education Committee meeting in June although the booking was not confirmed until the consultation had been approved. The public meeting on 10 September was advertised in the local press for the 2 weeks prior to the meeting, as well as on the Council's social media accounts a few days beforehand. As a general rule we find it more effective to concentrate the advertising near to the date of the meeting, so that it remains fresh in the mind.

There are four live consents for single houses in the area at present and work has started on two of these. Although there is local optimism about the provision of more housing, any proposals seem to be longer-term and aspirational rather than firm.

Each year, the Highland Council undertakes a forecasting exercise to predict future roll pressures on schools due to new housing and other factors. As part of the current School Roll Forecasting (SRF) methodology, planned new housing developments are expected to yield an average number of Primary and Secondary pupils into the local schools. These Pupil Product Ratio (PPR) values are one of the key data inputs to forecasting school rolls. The current PPR value for primary school age children in Ross-shire is 0.2, meaning that even 10 additional houses would normally produce no more than 2 additional pupils. As mentioned, there are live consents for only four houses in the area at present. The available data does not suggest any significant rise in the number of children locally.

None of the parents of young children mentioned in the response have been in touch to express any concern about the closure proposal, either in writing or at the meeting. The proposal has been extensively advertised locally, including to parents at the Kinder Croft nursery in Leckmelm.

As mentioned at Response 8, If the school is closed, the community could advance proposals for utilising the building, including in any of the ways suggested.

The comments about the travel time are noted. Clearly the approximate travel times can vary according to weather conditions and traffic volumes, although the busiest times of year for visitor traffic might largely coincide with the school summer holidays. As previously stated the Highland Council fully accepts that travel times from Badcaul to Ullapool are longer than desirable for primary school children. The school was however mothballed after parents chose to enrol at Ullapool Primary.

Badcaul Primary has not been operational since January 2022, a period of 3 years at the time of writing. Scoraig Primary has already had to adjust to the situation across all of that time.

The replacement radio link that enables IT services at Scoraig and Achiltibuie schools is due to be activated by December 2025 at the latest, and this closure proposal, if approved, would not be approved before May 2025.

Response 7 advises that there is no clear evidence about a link between school closures and the growth or decline of a community. Some communities thrive without a school and others continue to decline despite the presence of a school. Jobs and housing are the two most important factors in sustaining a community.

Issue 11

As a community member living in Durnamuck next to Badcaul and a parent of two former recent pupils I feel strongly that Badcaul primary should be given consideration for further mothballing for the next 5 years. The reasons I set before you: - The proposal to send future pupils to Ullapool primary is not ideal for several reasons –

First the time it takes to travel is as you say 41 mins on a good day- this can take considerably longer- if there is ice or snow on the Fain. The treacherous winter conditions is a valid reason in it self- I was worried on many days when my two children had to undertake that journey when at high school - let alone being very young and at primary. The children would be going and coming home from school in the dark in the winter - this long distance.

Many children hate this long journey from Dundonnell - often feel sick and struggle if there are issues with other children in a confined space of a bus every day! The children were always being called into the heads office and being asked to report on disruptive behaviour of other children (when at high school - this was for a 6-year period! If children are expected to go from primary 1 to Ullapool that is 13 years of this long journey! I think children will give up education early just not to do this journey! Speaking from experience.

Another issue with the transport system is that it is a small privately owned Minibus for the first leg of the journey to Ullapool - then the children have to change bus at Braemore junction - and get onto a public bus that comes from Dingwall. This is not acceptable to send 12 year olds onto a public bus unattended by a responsible PVG accredited adult. Teachers and people working with children have to be PVG accredited - by expecting young children to catch a public bus makes a nonsense of this! The children will be under the Highland councils care at this time - can the Highland Council guarantee their safety?

Second point - Badcaul Primary covers a large area from many directions and gives a very excellent option for children and parents to choose from with regards a primary school. There are actually more children of primary age in this area than quoted - some are being home schooled - if the school was open it would give an option and then the children that travel at present may well change to Badcaul.

Third point - As a community we are at the initial stages of getting 4 affordable family houses built in Badcaul. The land has been identified and we hope to realise the project with in the next 5 years. The local fish farm owned by MOWI are currently building a new hatchery- the company has very recently bought a large house with other large accommodation on site and a lot of land to build potential houses. There are going to be 16 jobs available at the hatchery- this could potentially mean that 16 families could move into the

area. This will not happen if there is not any chance of a primary school.

Fourth point- Re populating the Highlands has been the Governments mantra for a while- this will not happen when primary schools are closed-what will happen is an aging population will move in (which is fine) However - the community becomes unbalanced - for a thriving community a good balance of old and young is needed. The school provides jobs, encourages families into the area and is the foundation of a community.

Fifth point - There was always a healthy interaction with Scoraig primary School - where resources, teachers and experiences were shared. Both schools benefitted enormously - by having the children mix and make new friends - the schools supported each other - and more opportunities for both schools became available. A good symbiotic relationship. Much was gained and shared.

Sixth and final point - If the school was sold - its outlook does not look bright- it would be bought as a private house - but no school so not by a family! Or sold to a developer- for flats- no school - so no one with children will buy them. or sold as a holiday let- this will be the end of any chance at a community and add to the rapid de population of the Highlands. So it is with this in mind that I fervently ask that Badcaul Primary School is mothballed for a further 5 years to give us and it another chance.

If it does not cost the Highland Council anything to keep it mothballed nothing is lost - it may be gained in the form of a repopulated area and some hope.

I attended the public consultation on the proposal to close Badcaul School. My interest is that my daughter who attended Ullapool High School, is intending to return to live in Dundonnell in the summer of 2026. The move is planned to allow her daughter to continue her nursery education at their current location in England but for her to attend primary school here in the Highlands. The proposal and presentation at the public meeting in Badcaul was positive about the educational benefits of children being educated at Ullapool Primary school, but it made no reference to the adverse effects on small children having to travel a long distance back and forth to school. I was surprised to find out that no consideration has been given to the transport needs of the children, the proposal simply assumes that the existing transport arrangements are adequate. I strongly disagree with this assumption. It is not acceptable for young children of primary age to be ferried unescorted from Badcaul to Braemore Junction, and then placed on a public service bus unaccompanied, to continue the rest of the journey. While this arrangement has operated for years for High school children, young children starting primary school should not be exposed to risk in this manner and I would consider that even now at the present time the council is failing in its duty to care for vulnerable children. This should have been considered and addressed as part of the proposal to close the school and it should not be sweep under the carpet. Public transport is not available for a parent to take their child to school, so it puts an added burden on parents who do not wish their young children to travel 50 miles plus a day without an

accompanying adult. Over all I can see that that there is an economic case for closing the school based on current numbers but number may change over time, for example my daughter will be bringing her family to live in the area here in 2026, and no doubt there will be other such changes. The most sensible option would be to keep the school in mothballs but in the meantime the transport arrangements for young children travelling to Ullapool school needs to be urgently reconsidered.

Whilst the proposal paper presented by Highland council gives a clear argument for the closure of the school I do not think that this should be taken forward at this time and that the school should continue to be mothballed.

The reasons why the school should be mothballed rather than closed are: There are pre-school children living in the catchment area at present and another family are going to move in. These are children that are known about at present there is always the possibility that other families with young children may move into the area.

The transport arrangements for children to go to Ullapool primary school are not appropriate for young children, the length of the journey 32 mile is extreme, there is designated pupil only transport from Badcaul to Braemore junction but at this point the children transfer to a public service bus for the last 12 miles I do not see this as appropriate for young children.

Response 11

As set out above, the Council agrees that the travel time is undesirable. This has been covered in previous responses.

The transfer of pupils at Braemore junction takes place within the large la-by/parking area that lies directly opposite the junction itself. The transfer of pupils is supervised by the minibus driver who ensures all of the children transfer onto the Ullapool bus. The drivers of both vehicles are PVG checked. It is true that the bus to Ullapool is a public one and therefore available to passengers. It is common practice in Highland to make school services open to the public, and doing so provides a valuable public service. The Council will look at reserving seats at the front of the bus for primary age children, to address the concerns expressed.

It is noted that neither the parents involved in home-schooling, nor any pre-school parents currently in the area, have responded to the current consultation exercise. It may be inferred from this that they do not feel strongly about the proposed school closure.

It is speculative to say that 16 jobs, if created, could lead to 16 families moving in. Even if 16 new houses were built, the Council's school roll forecasting model suggest that around 3 additional primary school children would result. This would still be well below the figure required to make the school a fully viable educational facility.

Issue 12

The aging demographic of the catchment area will be unstoppable if Badcaul Primary School closes. The only way to attract young families to the area and to keep this wonderful crofting community alive, is to keep the school open. All children deserve equal opportunity to education regardless of where they live. The current practice of transporting children to Ullapool daily is adding a gruelling two hours, especially in winter, to their school day. This is surely detrimental to their wellbeing and education, especially for the younger children.

Myself, my siblings, my cousin, my father and aunt all attended Badcaul Primary School. My grandmother, her father and his father have all lived in the Little Loch Broom area, and likely more generations before.

Little by little traditional Highland culture and lifestyles is being destroyed. Closure of Badcaul Primary School will be the end of a community that has endured through the centuries, generation after generation.

Response 12

There is always an element of sadness to these events, when a historic village school closes. As mentioned at Response 7, the issue is simply a lack of demand for the school. Fundamentally, schools exist to provide education for children.

The transport issues have been covered elsewhere in the responses.

Issue 13

I am writing as the owner of a holiday rental property in Badcaul. While I do not need the local school personally, I believe it is an essential asset to the community, and I would like to express my support for avoiding its permanent closure.

If the school were to close, reopening it in the future would be extremely challenging. The nearest alternative, Ullapool, is too far away and results in long, stressful journeys for young children. I understand that maintaining the school in its current status is a cost-effective solution.

There are young families in the area, and keeping the school available will help preserve the local demographic and could attract more families to settle here. Permanently closing the school could negatively impact the community and change its character.

As someone invested in the local community, I hope the school remains available for future use, ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to benefit from it.

I have one child of primary school age p6, and when we moved here there was no option to attend the local school as it was mothballed. At that time I had 2 in primary school. While my children are older and don't mind the commute to Ullapool, it is a worry travelling to school in the winter so early in the morning. There are some mornings in really bad weather I won't put my children to school. It is also a long day for the children, they leave at 7:40 and return at 4:30. They also have homework to do after this and they do get tired, especially the younger one.

If my children were p1-3, I would have had serious second thoughts about moving to the area. It's too far for little ones.

I do realise though, that the demographics of the area don't support a school. There is no housing for families to come into the area, no other amenities for children.

I don't know what the forecasts are for this area in term of demographics, but if you want to attract young families to the area and stop rural depopulation or an ageing population, then closing the school may not be the best idea.

I do not think it is in the interest of the community in Badcaul and it is not in the interest of the children to travel to Ullapool to go to school, as the trip to Ullapool takes one hour. We need to keep the school to encourage new people to move to the area.

Response 13

The Council has not proposed the closure of Badcaul on financial grounds, but as a response to the lack of parental demand for a school in the community. In addition, we consider there are educational benefits to the closure, arising from the larger number of children in Ullapool Primary. These arguments were set out in detail in the Proposal Paper.

The Council agrees that the travel time to Ullapool is undesirable for primary school pupils, although the travel arrangements have already been in place for 3 years.

Issue 14

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 its 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.

Response 14

Kinlochbervie is an area which has seen a severe decline in the number of school children, despite the fact there is a High School and a primary school in the village itself, and two other primary feeder primary schools. At the time of writing, there are less than 80 pupils in the entire Associated School Group, spread between a secondary school and three primary schools. This shows that the existence of schools does not necessarily prevent a decline in the number of children in an area.

As highlighted above, the pupil changeover at Braemore Junction is monitored by the driver.

All parents of children currently attending Ullapool Primary, Ullapool PS nursery class and Kinder Croft Nursery were sent an individualised letter with a link to the Proposal Paper, as of course were the Community Council. The public meeting was well advertised locally and the proposal has been advertised on the Council's website ever since the start of the consultation on 26 August. There has been plenty of opportunity for anyone with concerns to get in touch.

In discussing transport arrangements, we have to take into account that Badcaul Primary has not actually operated now for more than 3 years. If the school is permanently closed, the transport arrangements from Badcaul to Ullapool will be the same as those that have operated since Jan

Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 7.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 7.2 In their report, Education Scotland agree with the council's reasons for the proposal to permanently close Badcaul Primary School. Numbers attending the school prior to mothballing were very small. At the time of mothballing, parents

decided that Ullapool Primary School would provide a more rounded educational experience for their children. The provision of stronger transitions from pre school to primary school and the availability of GME are also beneficial.

- 7.3 Education Scotland further noted that overall, parents and children were mostly in favour of the proposal. Children attending Ullapool Primary School enjoy their learning and feel that they have a positive experience with lots of opportunities. However, they expressed sadness at the loss of a village school. The report noted that the children who have moved to Ullapool Primary School have settled well and are enjoying their learning. The lack of primary school age children in the Badcaul area means that the re-opening of the primary school is unlikely. Continued mothballing of the school building will incur additional costs for the council and ongoing uncertainty for local residents. However, the council should continue to engage with local people in Badcaul and the surrounding areas due to the strength of feeling about the loss of the school building.

8.0 Effects on the Community

- 8.1 Paragraphs 13.1 - 13.3 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community, and advised that Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether the current school building and site could be turned over to community use.
- 8.2 The consultation exercise identified concerns about the effect of the school closure on the future health of the community. The issues raised are addressed at Responses 6-14 above.
- 8.3 Response 7 above highlights that there is no clear evidence to support the suggestion that the closure of a village school leads to a decline in local population. The Scottish Government's Commission on the Delivery of Rural Education, which reported in 2014, noted that the existence of a school is not always a pre-requisite for a community to exist or thrive, and that there is a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities.
- 8.4 Several responses have made reference to a decision by MOWI to develop a new hatchery in Little Loch Broom, adjacent to Badcaul. It is to be noted that this development has taken place in a community where a school last operated more than 3 years ago. This does not appear to have deterred the company from investing.

9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 9.1 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

10.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure

- 10.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation)

(Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Sections 5-8 of the Proposal Paper identified and discussed the following alternatives to closure:

- i. To continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- ii. To re-open Badcaul Primary School with its current catchment area.
- iii. To re-open Badcaul Primary School with an expanded catchment area.

- 10.2 Sections 6 and 7 of the Proposal Paper set out the Council’s consideration as to why Options i and ii above would not be viable options for Badcaul Primary School. No additional suggestions were made during consultation, although Option i – continued mothballing - was strongly favoured both by those who responded in writing and by those who attended the public meeting.
- 10.3 Similarly, in respect of option (iii) in paragraph 10.1 above, Section 8 of the original Proposal Paper set out the reasons why an expanded catchment area would not be a viable option for Badcaul Primary School. Again, no suggestion to this effect was made during consultation.
- 10.4 It was suggested in consultation that, in the event Badcaul Primary were closed, that the catchment should be re-allocated to that of Bualnaluib Primary rather than Ullapool Primary.
- 10.5 The above suggestion is not an “alternative to closure”. Rather it is a suggestion for an alternative course of action if the school does close. The issue was previously considered at Paragraphs 10.2-10.6 of the Proposal Paper at Appendix A.
- 10.6 Having reconsidered this point following consultation, Highland Council is not minded to change its stance on the re-allocation of the catchment, for the reasons stated in the Proposal. It would of course be possible to change the catchment areas in future, although this would be subject to statutory consultation.
- 10.7 Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Sections 5-8 of the Proposal Paper, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal.
- 10.8 No further alternative approaches were suggested during the consultation exercise:
- 10.7 The Council has also reconsidered the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to;

(a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 13 of the Proposal Paper and is further considered at Section 8 above.

- 10.8 The Council has further reconsidered the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.
- 10.9 The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Section 11 of the original proposal paper. Since Badcaul Primary School has been mothballed since January 2022, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. It is accepted that the travel times from Badcaul to Ullapool are unusually long for primary school children. However, this must be balanced against the reality of the simple lack of demand for a school at Badcaul, that has now been evident for 3 years.

11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers

- 11.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 27 March 2025 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so up until midnight on 16 April 2025. The Scottish Ministers will have until midnight on 21 May 2025 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in the decision to close Badcaul Primary School is asked to email schoolclosure@gov.scot or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by midnight on 16 April 2025.**
- 11.3 Until the outcome of the eight-week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

12.0 Legal issues

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 12.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, 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). As with all Council duties, the Council also 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). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

13.0 Financial Implications

- 13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued as Appendix D to the Proposal Paper.

14.0 Integrated Impact Assessment

- 14.1 An Integrated Assessment has been prepared, covering Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Socioeconomic Effects, Climate Change, Data Protection, and a Mainland Rural Area Assessment.
- 14.2 As the school is already mothballed, the Impact Assessment did not identify any issues relating to the above.

15.0 Effects on School Transport

- 15.1 The effects on school transport were considered at Section 11 of the Proposal Paper. As there are no pupils currently attending Badcaul Primary School, there are no differing school transport arrangements to take into account.

16.0 Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 16.1 Adverse effects were considered at S.17 of the proposal Paper, and none were identified. Again, this assessment was based on the fact that there are currently no pupils attending Badcaul Primary School.
- 16.2 Although no adverse effects can be identified for current pupils, a number of the consultation responses highlighted that the closure of the school would mean a long journey time for children in Badcaul, as compared with a hypothetical scenario in which Badcaul Primary was re-opened.

- 16.3 Appropriate school transport is and will continue to be provided for any children travelling from Badcaul to Ullapool for school.

17.0 Conclusion

- 17.1 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 in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10 above. For the reasons set out in detail in sections 5-8 above, Highland Council considers that implementation of the closure proposal is the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.
- 17.2 The most significant reason for closure is that firstly, there is general agreement that there is no possibility of re-opening Badcaul Primary School at the present time, due to the lack of children willing to attend. Secondly, the school has now been mothballed for 3 years, and it is time to come to decision on the permanent future of the school. Lastly, there is no evidence to suggest that the number of children in the catchment in the future would be enough to make the school viable, and that there would consequently be educational disadvantages arising from such a decision. Lastly, Ullapool Primary School is itself a rural school.
- 17.3 Education Scotland staff visited Ullapool 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. They agree that The Highland Council's proposal will result in educational benefits for the children of the Badcaul Primary School catchment area.
- 17.4 The Assistant Chief Executive (People), 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 proposal offers educational benefits and that implementation of the Proposal in full is the most appropriate response to the reason for formulating the Proposal. The reasons for this conclusion are set out at Sections 5-10 above.

18.0 Recommendation

- 18.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Badcaul Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Ullapool Primary School.

Kate Lackie
Assistant Chief Executive (People)
28 January 2025