Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

Appendix A

Tullynessle School Options Appraisal

1. Introduction

Aberdeenshire Council strives to allocate its resources in a way that ensures the quality of all its services. It attaches particular importance to providing the best possible educational experience for all pupils within its schools.

An update to the Aberdeenshire Learning Estate Strategy proposing a movement towards a sustainable learning estate was agreed by Education and Children's Services Committee on 1 February 2024. The Council's strategy sets out the council's aspirations for our schools using a holistic place-based approach, which will ensure that services can be delivered in an optimum way, making the best use of available assets, whilst potentially identifying underperforming and surplus assets. The strategy also defines the ideal occupancy level of a school, which would be approximately 85%, with a target occupancy band between 75% and 90%. An excessively low level of occupancy is unlikely to be sustainable, affordable or leading to a best-value estate.

Government Guidelines within Scotland's Learning Estate Strategy "Connecting People, Places and Learning" Guiding Principle states that "Learning environments should support the wellbeing of all learners, meet varying needs to support inclusion and support transitions for all learners" and that "the Learning Estate should be well managed and maintained, making the best of existing resources, maximising occupancy and representing and delivering best value."

At its meeting on 7 October 2021, Education and Children's Services Committee agreed that when a primary school has eight or fewer pupils, then the Director of Education and Children's Services should consider mothballing, subject to an assessment of the school roll forecast that does not indicate that there will be sufficient in zone pupils to increase the roll above eight pupils in the next two years.

A decision to temporarily mothball Tullynessle School from the start of the new academic year, August 2024, was taken by the Director of Education & Children's Services in May 2024. This decision was made in line with the mothballing protocol which was in force at that time.

On 29 August 2024, Education and Children's Services Committee instructed officers to commence the pre-engagement stages of a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010 with regards to the permanent closure of the school. This was in response to a request from Tullynessle Parent Action Committee (TPAC) for the

Council to proceed directly to the statutory consultation on closure, as outlined in paragraph 65 of the Act.

On 10 October 2024, the Education and Children's Services Committee approved changes to the process of mothballing schools. The Director of Education and Children's Services, in consultation with the Leadership Team, makes this decision when a school's roll falls to eight or fewer pupils. If data indicate that the school is unlikely to become viable in the medium term, a statutory consultation should commence to begin the process of closure or merger. In this case, mothballing serves as an interim measure to safeguard the pupils' educational benefits and social wellbeing. If the data suggest that the school could become viable again in the medium-to-long term, mothballing will be implemented to preserve the educational benefits and social wellbeing of the pupils until the school can be reassessed for reopening.

Mothballing is the temporary closure of a school which does not in itself lead to statutory consultation. This decision is taken in accordance with the Scottish Government's statutory guidance contained in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act of 2010. The Act requires that educational benefits should be at the heart of any proposal to make a significant change to schools, for current and future pupils in the area.

2. Background / Discussion

In April 2024 it became evident that at the start of the academic year, the Tullynessle School roll would decrease to eight pupils (including one potential out of zone request), due to parents submitting placing requests out of the school. Schools with a low roll prompt an assessment around the viability of the school and the educational benefits and wellbeing for the pupils. The Council was no longer able to deliver viable education at Tullynessle School.

Officers met with Ward Members to discuss the viable options for Tullynessle School due to the decreasing roll.

In May 2024 the decision to temporarily mothball Tullynessle School from August 2024 was made by the Director of Education & Children's Services.

The information about the intention to mothball the school was shared with the Ward Members on 23 April 2024 and with the staff and the parents/carers of Tullynessle School on 1 May 2024. At that point, information was shared regarding the relocation of staff and also which schools would be made available to pupils with transport provided.

Pupils from Tullynessle School were offered a place at either Alford Primary School or Keig School.

Individual meetings with parents were held to discuss personal circumstances and to give support to each family. The families were assured that, should mothballing continue, younger siblings who have yet to start school, would also be guaranteed a place at the school of choice and transport would be provided to one of the dedicated schools.

Upon consultations with affected families and staff, all pupils were successfully placed at Keig School, based on families' preferences, and all staff were appropriately relocated.

On 29 August 2024, a report was presented to Education and Children's Services Committee informing the Committee of the decision that Tullynessle School was mothballed from August 2024.

The Primary 1 admission period for all Aberdeenshire Schools takes place in January each year. Press releases were issued to inform families that applications could be made for pupils to enrol at school. The deadline for submitting out of zone placing requests is 15 March annually. Communication was shared with the Tullynessle, Keig and Alford Primary schools' communities, on the Tullynessle School website, Facebook and Engage Aberdeenshire portal that applications and placing requests would be considered if sufficient numbers were received to ensure the school's reopening. No applications or out of zone requests to Tullynessle School have been received since the school was mothballed.

On 3 March 2025, officers wrote to all residents of the Tullynessle School catchment area and parents/carers whose children were enrolled at Tullynessle School before mothballing, giving them the opportunity to express their interest in their child(ren) enrolling at the school. No family has shown an interest in enrolling their child(ren) in P1 to P7 at the school.

Due to there being no pupils wishing to return to Tullynessle School to make the educational experience viable, the school will remain mothballed for the 2025/26 session.

On 22 May 2025, a report will be presented to Education & Children's Services Committee informing of the decision that Tullynessle School will be mothballed for a further 2025/26 academic year.

3. Community Engagement

The broader school community was informed that any future closure consultations for Tullynessle School and the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting would be conducted separately. This distinction was necessary as ELC settings do not have defined catchment areas. Feedback related to the ELC setting was directed to the Early Years Team for review, while comments concerning the school were considered by the Learning Estates Team.

Efforts were made to ensure the community was kept informed and actively engaged in discussions regarding the future of Tullynessle School. The pre-engagement stage is an essential part of ensuring all relevant stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input before the formal statutory consultation process commences.

3.1 Drop-in Session

The first pre-engagement drop-in session was held on 2 October 2024 at Tullynessle & Forbes Community Hall. All residents within the Tullynessle settlement, out of zone families

enrolled at the school during mothballing, Donside Community Council, local Councillors and Marr Area Manager were invited to participate in the event. The session was also advertised on Aberdeenshire Council's Facebook page.

About 50 community members attended the session. All participants had opportunity to ask questions, which were answered at the time, and to provide input before Officers advance to the formal statutory consultation process. During the event, a variety of essential information was presented, including a statutory consultation flowchart, a guide to the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010, and the Engagement HQ portal. Additional materials covered topics such as school details, pupil data, school roll projections, housing zoned to the Tullynessle School catchment and maps. Participants could also familiarise themselves with the Place and Wellbeing Assessment principles and received contact details for further engagement and inquiries.

Attendees provided feedback via comment cards. The comments were analysed and are summarised below.

- *Impact on Children Moving to Keig*
- Keig has doubled in size, and there has been no additional support for children.
- Some children who previously enjoyed school are now struggling due to the changes.
- *Community Loss*
- The Tullynessle & Forbes Community Association views the school as a great asset to the community and are pleased to have the children from the school using or visiting the hall.
- *School Closure Process*
- Parents expressed disappointment with the rushed timeline from announcement to mothballing, leaving only 8 weeks to prepare.
- Concerns about the lack of communication with Keig families about the mothballing decision.
- *Alternative Proposals for School*
- Some suggest rezoning the Tullynessle catchment area to Keig School if the school closes, helping support another small rural school.
- Keeping a full-time nursery open instead of closing the school was seen as a sensible option.

The vast majority of comments focused on concerns regarding the mothballing of the nursery, including its impact on families, children, and the community, as well as calls for its reopening.

3.2 Online Surveys

Two online surveys were conducted between 18 and 29 November 2024: one for Keig School staff and another for parents/carers of Keig pupils. These were for the purpose of internal evaluation of the impact of mothballing on the receiving schools.

Staff Survey: Five Keig School staff members participated. The survey revealed that the transition of the Tullynessle pupils to Keig School was handled well. However, there were challenges and concerns expressed about the insufficient number of support staff, the emotional impact on families and the decision to mothball Tullynessle School, particularly Nursery.

Parent/Carer Survey: A total of 18 parents/carers responded. The survey responses reflected a mixed range of experiences and sentiments regarding the mothballing of Tullynessle School and Nursery and the integration of the Tullynessle pupils into Keig School. While some families see the integration as a positive change that brought new opportunities for their children, other families observed significant concerns around the lack of resources, support and effective management of the transition process.

3.3 Public Meeting

The second pre-engagement public meeting was held on 4 December 2024 at Tullynessle & Forbes Community Hall. The same stakeholder groups were invited, and approximately 12 members of the public attended. The meeting was minuted and minutes were published on the Aberdeenshire Engage portal and are attached as Appendix A1 to this report.

During the event, the participants were asked to provide alternatives to closure on the provided comment cards. They were informed of the submission deadline of 31 December 2024 and given other submission options, including email and by post. The attendees were also encouraged to share this information with the wider community.

3.4 Emails

Between 25 September 2024 and 3 February 2025, emails were received regarding the potential closure of Tullynessle School and Nursery. The comments regarding Tullynessle School were analysed and are summarised below. Feedback regarding ELC provision was forwarded to the Early Years Team and was not included in this analysis.

- *Impact on Rural Community*
- The school has a long history and has been a vital hub for the community, fostering close relationships and a sense of belonging.
- Access to a fantastic learning environment and opportunities available at Tullynessle has been taken away from the children.
- Without a local school and nursery, attracting new families to the area will become challenging.
- The school building and work outdoor spaces maintained through parent fundraising and volunteer efforts, will deteriorate during mothballing.
- *Justification for Mothballing*
- The school's declining enrolment could have been mitigated through better management, such as: providing transport to after-school care in Alford; rezoning

Bridge of Alford and all houses at the north side of the Don back from the Alford Primary School catchment area to the Tullynessle School catchment; training/assistance to Head Teachers to better foster parent/teacher relationships.

- Concerns were raised that the mothballed building may not be properly managed, leading to increased reopening costs.
- Mothballing contradicts with the ongoing housing developments within the Tullynessle area which will naturally increase demand for school placements and within the Alford area which will put more pressure on the already over-subscribed Alford Primary School.

• *Concerns about Mothballing Process*

- Residents and Community Councils should have been consulted with to find alternatives to mothballing.
- The Council has not developed any substantial evidence and the mothballing is a planned action leading to a permanent closure of the school.
- The closure will have a negative impact on nursery and school provisions in the area, e.g. over-utilisation of Alford Primary School and other local settings.

3.5 Future pre-engagement

As part of the ongoing pre-engagement process, another public meeting is scheduled for 27 March 2025.

Additionally, a survey will be distributed to Keig pupils to gather their views on the mothballing of Tullynessle School.

4. Options Appraisal

An options appraisal has been undertaken to consider the future of Tullynessle School to ensure the best educational experience and social benefits for pupils within the Tullynessle catchment area.

4.1 Tullynessle School

Tullynessle School is non-denominational and serves the hamlet of Tullynessle and the surrounding rural area. Tullynessle is located three miles north-northwest of Alford.

The school building was constructed in 1922 and extended in subsequent years. Originally the school had two classrooms with a capacity of 50 pupils and in 2021 the nursery moved from the temporary accommodation into the main school building. Subsequently the school has a capacity of 25 pupils and comprises of one classroom and GP hall arranged over a single storey at ground level. There are also ancillary spaces such as a kitchen, office and staff room in addition to staff and pupil toilet facilities. The building is heated by two gas-fired boilers.

Meals for pupils were prepared by Alford Academy at the Community Campus kitchen and delivered to Tullynessle School on a daily basis.

The outdoor areas are a concrete playground at the school front and back and a spacious grass playing field on a side of the school building. There are some picnic tables with benches, wooden planters and limited play equipment.

The drawing of the school grounds and the school floorplan are attached as Appendix A2 to this report.

Tullynessle School delivered primary education from P1 to P7, and pupils were taught in a multi-composite single class.

The ELC provision at Tullynessle School is currently mothballed and the subject of a separate engagement.

A high-level review of the title deeds has been requested.

4.2 Tullynessle School Core Facts

Every local authority in Scotland is required to grade their schools for condition and suitability. The gradings range from A to D for each category with the following values:

A: Good – Performing well and operating efficiently (85-100%)
B: Satisfactory – Performing adequately but with minor problems (60-85%)
C: Poor – Showing major problems and/or not operating optimally (40- 60%)
D: Bad – Does not support the delivery of services to children and communities (0-40%)

Condition is an assessment of the physical condition of the school building and its grounds. Tullynessle School was assessed in October 2022 and the overall condition rating for the property is 'B – Satisfactory'. Within the condition survey, toilets, and heat source and equipment received a grade 'A – Good', while floor finishes, ceilings, walls fences and gates received a grade 'C – Poor'.

The condition survey considered maintenance required to maintain service delivery and the investment required is £94,817 for the next five years and £138,754 for the total works required (data correct as of October 2022).

Suitability is an assessment of the school as a whole, the buildings, the grounds and the impact they have on teaching and learning, leisure and social activities, as well as the health and wellbeing of users. The Suitability assessment of Tullynessle School was carried out in July 2023 and the school was graded as 'A – Good'. Practical and collaborative learning spaces and functionality of the meeting rooms, and staff bases were graded 'C – Poor'.

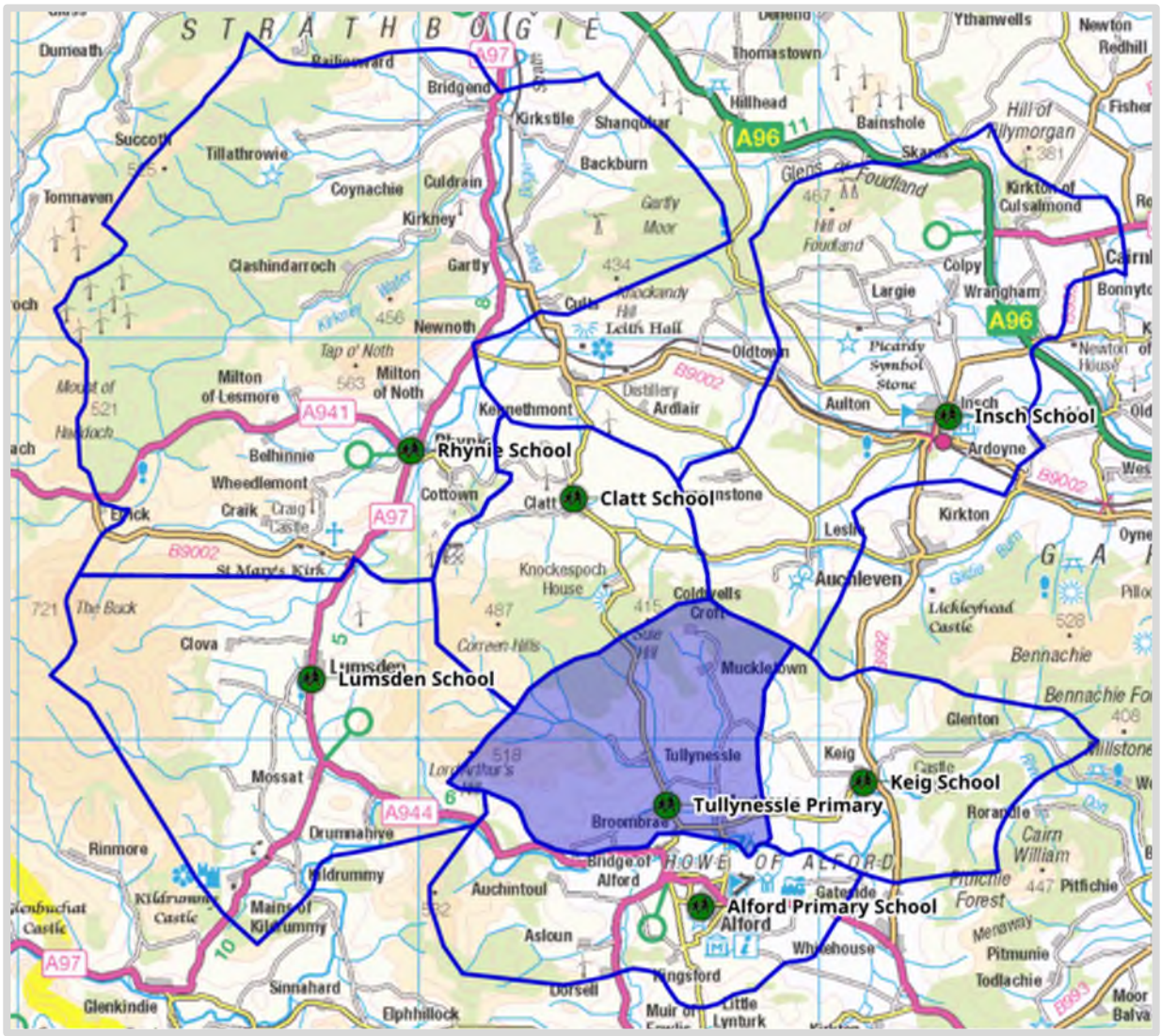
4.3 Tullynessle and Local Area

Under the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification Tullynessle School is a 'remote rural school' (areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes but less than or equal to 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more).

The catchment area for the school stretches from Den of Drumgowan on the north to Hole of Haughton on the south and from Satter Hill on the east to Lord Arthur's Hill on the west.

The school borders with Alford Primary, Keig and Lumsden Schools which sit within the Alford Cluster and Clatt and Insch Schools within the Huntly Cluster. This is presented in Map 1 below.

Map 1 – Catchment area for Tullynessle School and surrounding schools



Clatt School is currently mothballed and the subject of a separate statutory closure consultation. The Council has proposed to re-assign the Clatt School catchment area to either Kennethmont School or Rhynie School and the officers' recommendation is that the Clatt School catchment should be reassign to Rhynie School. Clarity on this will come after the Scottish Government's call-in period, anticipated to end in June 2025.

Distances between Tullynessle School and surrounding schools sourced from Google Maps are listed below:

- Keig School – 3.6 miles
- Alford Primary School – 2.3 miles
- Lumsden School – 8.2 miles
- Rhynie School – 9.2 miles
- Insch School – 10.4 miles

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a measure of deprivation across 6,976 data zones. SIMD ranks data zones from most deprived (ranked as 1) to least deprived (ranked as 6,976) and Tullynessle data zone is ranked at 5596. This indicates that pupils living within the Tullynessle School catchment are not considered living in socio-economical deprived households.

4.4 Rural Sustainability and Housing Development

Tullynessle is a hamlet in rural Aberdeenshire, sited amongst farms and fields. Members of the community are involved in the farming industry and the residences are scattered over a wide area.

Tullynessle is a disparate settlement. Members of the community travel to Alford or other nearby settlements to access shops, post office, health centre, library and community sports facilities.

According to the 2024 Housing Land Audit data, there are no allocated development sites agreed for Tullynessle. Therefore, there is little prospect of generating new pupils into the area to reinstate the school.

4.5 Demographics and Pupil Numbers

Before Tullynessle School was mothballed in August 2024, enrolment patterns had been fluctuating due to parental placing requests both in and out of the school. Over the decade leading up to its mothballing, 44 P1 children resided in the Tullynessle area who could have enrolled at the school, only 24 had.

In May 2024 (SEEMIS extract 10 May 2024), six of the 32 primary age children living within the Tullynessle School catchment were enrolled at their zoned school.

At the time of mothballing in August 2024, the school roll would have been eight pupils, including one potential out-of-zone placement, all taught in one composite P1–P7 class.

There are currently 24 children of P1-P7 age residing within the catchment area of Tullynessle School (SEEMIS extract 6 March 2025). These children all attend other schools in the area, some through placement when the school was mothballed and the vast majority through parental choice in previous academic sessions. The majority attend Alford Primary School and Keig School.

Currently, nursery age children are enrolled at a range of ELC settings.

School roll forecasts show a very small number of families living in the catchment area with children that are under school age. According to the NHS data, seven children within the catchment area could enrol for P1 between August 2026 and August 2028. If all former pupils re-enrolled at the school and every child under school age enrolled, the projected school roll would be as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – 2024 Live School Roll Forecasts

	2025	2026	2027	2028
Possible P1 Pupils *	fewer than 5	fewer than 5	fewer than 5	fewer than 5
Housing	0	0	0	0
SRF	0	8	7	6
Total Capacity	25	25	25	25

* Due to GDPR this data have been suppressed to prevent from possible identification of an individual

4.6 Occupancy

During 2023/24 session at its peak there were 14 pupils on the school roll. With the capacity of 25 the occupancy level was 56%. From August 2024, with a roll of only eight pupils the utilisation of the school would have reduced to 32% had the school remained operational. Such a low occupancy level does not support the education and wellbeing of all learners. In addition, low occupancy is unsustainable, unaffordable and does not offer the best value.

4.7 Pupil Enrolments

As outlined above in Section 2 of this report, Aberdeenshire Council had written to parents/carers of pupils residing within the Tullynessle School catchment if they wished their children to continue their education at Tullynessle School. No families have expressed an interest in returning to Tullynessle School for the session 2025/26.

Primary 1 applications can be submitted for mothballed school during the January admission period. Since 2024/25 academic year no families have approached Aberdeenshire Council

to enrol their children at Tullynessle School. The deadline for submitting placing requests for August start is 15 March and no applications have been received for pupils wishing to attend Tullynessle School since the school was mothballed.

From the data held by the Service, all children known to be residing in the Tullynessle School catchment have submitted placing requests to attend other schools.

4.8 Tullynessle Community

In recent years the school did not provide a breakfast or after school club. Over the last five years, the building was used by Parent Council on one occasion only during the 2023/24 session and was never utilised as a community facility during its time as a school.

During the mothballing period, TPAC requested to use the school and nursery for a community Christmas Carol event and party. This request was declined as the building was maintained on a 'wind and watertight' basis, making it unsuitable and unsafe for public use. TPAC was encouraged to liaise with ECS Lets Team to identify alternative venues for the event but did not pursue this option.

Tullynessle and Forbes Community & Hall Association, located 0.4 miles from the school, is a large modern, well-equipped facility with a main hall, a smaller hall, kitchen amenities and other ancillary spaces. The hall is regularly used by the local community for birthday parties, film nights, dancing, health and fitness classes and other community gatherings.

As outlined in Section 4.4, residents already travel to nearby settlements to access essential services, such as GP, dental surgeries, shops and other sports and community facilities.

The evidence outlined above indicates that the community does not rely on the school as a public/community facility. There will be little impact on the existing arrangements of the community as well as its sustainability if the school is permanently closed.

The ongoing Place and Wellbeing Assessment will further assess the impact of mothballing Tullynessle School on the community, and community input would be crucial in shaping future decisions.

5. Options for Consideration

The wider community were encouraged to submit suggestions and alternatives by 31 December 2024. A few comments were received during the meeting held on 4 December 2024 and only one submission was received following the meeting. Some observations were educational and community based, whilst others would involve commitment from the community, other agencies or private companies. These cannot be implemented or trialed without the formal closure of the school.

A summary list of suggestions and comments with an overview of the requirements for them to be implemented can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2

No.	Alternative / Suggestion	Justification / Requirement for implementation
1	Maintaining a viable primary school and increasing efforts to support enrolment rather than closing it.	This aspect is analysed in Sections 2 and 4 of this report. Officers regularly monitor pupil numbers across all schools; however, under the 1981 Parents' Charter parents have the right to submit a placing request for their preferred school.
2	Reopening the school with increased enrolment by providing transport to after-school care in Alford.	There is no statutory entitlement to travel assistance for pre-school age children attending ELC settings (some exemptions may apply) or after-school clubs.
3	Reopening the school with increased enrolment through a community led campaign to promote the school and attract families.	This would require continued mothballing and strong community commitment.
4	Monitoring local housing developments that may lead to increased school enrolment.	This factor is assessed in Section 4 of this report. There are no housing sites allocated within the Local Development Plan for the Tullynessle School catchment.
5	Rezoning Bridge of Alford and all houses at the north side of the Don back from the Alford Primary School catchment area to the Tullynessle School catchment.	There are no new housing developments located within the stated area. When rezoning catchment areas, existing pupils can remain in their current school and their siblings are entitled to join them. Therefore, the change in the boundary line is unlikely to have a high impact upon the number of pupils available to attend Tullynessle School.
6	Pausing the statutory consultation and keeping the school mothballed to allow time for potential population growth.	Mothballing is a standard protocol which allows reassessment of circumstances after a year or later and this process would also apply to Tullynessle School. This statutory closure consultation pre-engagement has been initiated earlier than usual at the request of TPAC.

7	Providing training and support to Head Teachers to better foster parent/teacher relationships.	Head Teachers in Aberdeenshire Council participate in a range of professional development training programs, and they are equipped with essential skills to foster strong relationships and to build positive relationships between staff and families.
8	Reinstating the nursery and splitting primary education across two schools, with Tullynessle accommodating P1–P3 and Keig P4–P7 stages.	Further engagement with other sectors within Aberdeenshire Council relating to the nursery's reopening. Statutory consultation would be required for a merger of Tullynessle and Keig Schools, operating as one school with a new identity.
9	Rezoning the Tullynessle catchment area to Keig School to support another small rural school.	The school closure process would be required to realign the Tullynessle School catchment to Keig School.
10	Repurposing the school building as a nursery or early learning centre.	The school closure process would be required and further engagement with other sectors within Aberdeenshire Council, community or private sector commitment.
11	Repurposing the school building as a community hub for events and activities.	The school closure process would be required and further community or private sector commitment.

The following options were considered for the future of Tullynessle School as part of the options appraisal:

1 Reopen the school – Reopening of the school requires families wishing to enrol their children at the school. No pupils have enrolled at the school and no families have indicated that they would wish to attend the school. This option has been discounted.

2 Continue Status Quo – School remains mothballed for a further session and potentially beyond. The school has been mothballed since August 2024. The longer the school is mothballed the more uncertainty for families and the community the situation causes.

3 Progress with the closure of Tullynessle School and rezone of pupils to attend another school in the area.

6. Conclusion

There are only two viable options for Tullynessle School identified as part of the options

appraisal. One is continuation of the mothballing and the other is to progress with the closure consultation. The closure consultation must be carried out in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. As a rural school, there is a presumption against closure and Aberdeenshire Council must ensure all other alternatives have been identified and robustly considered prior to undertaking any statutory consultation on this matter.

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL

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Appendix A1

Tullynessle School Public Engagement
Tullynessle and Forbes Community Hall
Wednesday 4 December 2024, 5.00 pm

Aberdeenshire Council Officers: Maxine Booth (Quality Improvement Manager), Rachael Goldring (Learning Estates Team Leader), Matthew Smart (Shaping Places for Wellbeing Community Link Lead), Anna Zadka-Labus (Learning Estates Officer, minutes), Deborah Masson (Quality Improvement Officer).

Around 12 members of the public attended the meeting.

Welcome

Maxine Booth welcomed everyone to the meeting. Max informed that the meeting will be minuted, and the minutes will be available on the Engagement HQ Platform.

Background

Maxine Booth - In May 2024, the Director of Education & Children's Services decided to temporarily mothball Tullynessle School at the start of the new term in August 2024. This decision was based on mothballing criteria approved by the ECS Committee in October 2021.

On 7 May 2024, the Tullynessle Parent Action Group submitted a letter opposing this decision and requested that the Council move directly to a statutory consultation on the school's closure.

Subsequently, on 29 August 2024, the ECS Committee instructed officers to commence the pre-engagement stage of a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010 to explore the permanent closure of the school. This process includes an options appraisal to determine the best course of action.

It is essential to emphasise that any potential closure consultations for the primary school and the Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) setting will be conducted separately, as ELC settings do not have catchment areas. Today's discussion is focused solely on Tullynessle Primary School, P1–P7.

Early Learning and Childcare

Maxine Booth - ECS Committee will be considering a report on the mothballing/deactivating Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings on Thursday 5 December which provides guidance on the scenarios, assessment and process for mothballing/deactivating an ELC setting. The future of Tullynessle ELC setting will be considered separately through review

of the Alford cluster delivery model and capacity to ensure any proposals regarding the future of Tullynessle ELC are informed by key data on local births, uptake, staffing and local need and priorities. Further information regarding next steps will be communicated in 2025.

School information

Maxine Booth - Tullynessle School is part of the Alford Cluster, consisting of 13 primary schools within the catchment area for Alford Academy.

School roll and School Roll Forecast

Rachael Goldring - The school roll has declined steadily, from 21 pupils in 2018 to 13 in 2023. At the start of the 2024/25 session, the roll was to drop to 8 pupils, including one potential out-of-zone request. This was due to parents submitting placing requests out of the school.

The school roll forecast shows a decrease in the roll at Tullynessle School in future years. There are no housing developments within the catchment area for the foreseeable future.

At the time of mothballing 2023 Live School Roll Forecast for Tullynessle School projected that there would be 8 pupils on the roll from 2024 until 2026, and 6 pupils from 2027.

Tullynessle 2024 Live School Roll Forecast shows that if the school reopens and all former pupils re-enrol at the school, there will be 7 pupils on the roll in sessions 2025 and 2026, 5 pupils in 2027 and 3 in 2028.

For the school to become operational again there needs to be sufficient pupils on the roll to make educational experiences viable and to ensure that pupils receive the entirety of the broad curricular entitlements that the local authority is expected to provide to children.

Any parents of P1 children for August 2025 should still apply for the school during the admissions period in January 2025 and placing requests from other schools will also be considered.

Community Engagement

Rachael Goldring - The pre-engagement stage is an essential part of ensuring all relevant stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input before we advance to the formal statutory consultation process. As we move forward, once sufficient information has been gathered, we will proceed with the statutory consultation.

The first community pre-engagement event, held on 2 October 2024, covered both primary and nursery provisions. It was attended by 47 individuals, with much of the interest focused on the ELC setting.

Suggestions and alternatives

Rachael Goldring - One of the options identified as part of the appraisal is to close the school. We welcome your suggestions for alternative options. As a rural school there is a presumption against closure and Aberdeenshire Council must ensure all other alternatives have been identified and robustly considered prior to undertaking any statutory consultation on this matter.

If closure is assessed as the only viable option for the school, then Aberdeenshire Council must undertake a statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

Comments can be shared tonight using the comment cards provided or emailed to LearningEstates@aberdeenshire.gov.uk. The deadline for submitting suggestions is **5.00 pm** on **31 December 2024.**

Place and Wellbeing Assessment

Matthew Smart - The real-life impact on the community will be evaluated through a Place and Wellbeing Assessment, conducted in collaboration with community members and key stakeholders. This evidence-based assessment is intended not only to address any unintended consequences of the proposal but also to strengthen the aspects that lead to positive outcomes for the community. It will focus on evaluating the effects of the mothballing of the school and nursery, as well as the potential closures, on the community.

Questions

Maxine Booth - We will now open the floor for questions. Please introduce yourself and your role or interest in the school (e.g., parent, pupil, staff, community member).

Attendee - I am aware of at least three planning housing applications in the area, as opposed to what was just said.

Rachael Goldring - there are no allocated housing sites, but that doesn't stop people from preparing individual applications for a house, but there's no planned strategic housing development.

There was a discussion that there is a site with around 13 plots for sale, and this potential housing would be within the Tullynessle catchment zone. There will be more houses going to be built. There was further discussion about available plots in the area, and Coldwells Builders and their links.

Rachael Goldring - we have not seen any planning applications for houses in this area, but we will check that.

From mountain to sea

Discussion took place about potential housing increasing possible roll at Tullynessle but also hugely increasing the pressure on Keig School, which currently has 43 pupils.

Attendee - I would like to know, if houses are being built in the area, what will happen with the Keig School capacity? Will there be space for younger siblings?

Maxine Booth - yes, if Tullynessle remains mothballed. Part of the statutory consultation and options appraisal is to know where the boundary line should be drawn. Parents and community will have their say about where this line should be drawn. Whenever a school is closed, it is assigned in whole to one school or it can be divided between different schools. But that is determined through discussion with the community about where they wish it to go.

Attendee - it cannot be short sighted. When nursery was mothballed the Early Years Manager said that the process around mothballing the nursery was the capacity. It wasn't child focused. It doesn't have to work just because there is more space at Alford that in Tullynessle School, as people move to these communities because they want rural schools.

Maxine Booth - that's right. A while back, when we rezoned of Westhill area, Skene School community didn't want new houses to be in their catchment, because they didn't want the school to grow bigger, they wanted a small, rural school. Parents have that choice about choosing a small scale school over a bigger school.

Attendee - do you have projections for Keig for next year, assessing Tullynessle numbers?

Maxine Booth - we have combined school roll forecast for Keig and Tullynessle, which was discussed with the Head Teacher. Next year there will be a small number of Tullynessle pupils going to Keig School.

There was discussion about Keig School capacity and possible tight roll and other families choosing schools out of their own catchments, wanting to go to Keig School.

Rachael Goldring - we would be monitoring the numbers, for example, people from Alford catchment and people from Tullynessle catchment wanting to go to Keig School, and if the capacity at Keig is too tight those requests from other schools than Tullynessle would be refused.

Maxine Booth - we prioritise out of zone placing request in line with the policy. Tullynessle children would have entitlement to a place at Keig School, if any spaces are available, they could go to other families. But we may keep this school only for Keig and Tullynessle children. When schools reach capacity, we first look at reconfiguration of the spaces and we consider any new housing in the area, we may even cap a school. But this is not what data for this area states.

Attendee - but if there's 13 houses built in the area?

Maxine Booth - for rural schools, one family can have a big impact on the situation. For Tullynessle, the data we hold does not evidence the numbers rising again and we do not want to reopen the school it to be mothballed again. Currently, the numbers are not there. If new housing is going to be built, we would ask if anyone wanted to come back. Even if they all did, the numbers do not show the school to be viable. It is a big decision to mothball a school, and we don't want to reopen it to close again, because that's disruptive for the children.

Attendee - what the council's definition of what viable is?

Maxine Booth - a viable is a school that remains above eight pupils.

Attendee - Tullynessle School was thriving, there were eight pupils but it was mothballed.

One attendee described her family situation following the nursery mothballing. There is not childcare availability in Alford on the days her family requires. Mothballing the nursery has badly affected her family and their life.

Maxine Booth - I understand, but this meeting is about the primary school, P1 to P7 stages. However, we can take your comments to the Early Years Team. There's a paper about deactivating nurseries going to Education & Children's Services Committee tomorrow. Following the committee's decision, it will then go forward and there'll be information shared. But you can write down your comments and these will be transferred to Early Learning and Childcare officers.

Matthew Smart - the wellbeing assessment will be looking at unintended consequences of mothballing the school and unfortunately the nursery goes along with it. Everyone who wants to discuss the nursery, please talk to me. This assessment is about the school, but there is a lot of cross collaboration between different departments. While Early Years Team states they are very distinct and very separate, with my role in this process and information I hold, I may feed into their process moving forward. Contacting me individually or as a group will allow me to capture lots of information about different aspects of mothballing the school.

Maxine Booth - a few years ago we had to mothball a school and after speaking with the community we found out that, what was not our intention, the mothballing had a big impact on the older people in the community who benefited from the school being there, for example: nativities, Christmas cards or harvest teas. We work alongside Matthew, because we understand how place is important, and schools are obviously central to that. But we can't have a school without children. We want to know more about how we can work with communities to make sure that things are continued.

Matthew Smart - some information is not in the data hold by the Council or is not up to date, so speaking with communities we know what is going on there.

Maxine Booth - generally a school is mothballed for up to two years, and while it is mothballed, we start planning the next stages. This is in line with the Scottish Government guidelines. However, Tullynessle Parent Action Group requested for us to initiate the closure statutory consultation. But this can be paused, you will need to decide as a group. If paused, the school will remain mothballed and it will give us a couple years to see what happens next, if any new houses will generate any children. There is another community we currently work with, and when we suggested that we should go straight to merger with another school, because there's no data suggesting that there's going to be more children to make their school viable. And they asked to allow them two years to see they can generate children or get children to come to their school. That's still an option for Tullynessle.

Attendee - we pushed for the consultation to happen because we wanted to have a say 'now', because of the nursery. If it was just the school we could say let's pause it, but there is a need for the nursery to reopen. So, the aim was to deal with the school first, as we heard the school comes first, and then focus on the nursery.

Attendee - the community felt completely unheard and not acknowledged by Director of Education, Education Committee Chair and local Councillors. No officials came to meetings we organised. Meetings during mothballing were not minuted. So that's why we pushed, not even just because of the decisions, but the way people and parents were treated. We wanted a statutory consultation, where things will be noted and structured.

Maxine Booth - mothballing a school is an operational decision, we talk to affected families and parents. Now you can decide if you want the school mothballed or go to the statutory consultation. At the initial meeting regarding mothballing many parents stated that they would not be enrolling their P1 children for August 2025 at Tullynessle School.

Attendee - the biggest issue was that the school went from two to one class. And there was no chance of making it two classes again, because the nursery was put into the school. As a parent, do you want your child in a small school one to seven, or a bigger school. Keig school is fantastic to us and now we are losing some of the things we like about Keig, because there is so many children on the roll.

Maxine Booth - Keig School had large P1 intake, so the increased roll is not only due to the Tullynessle children. The reasons why the nursery moved into the school building, was because none of the data said that the numbers were going to rise. Families often move their children out of a school when it goes from two classes to one as some parents don't want siblings to be in the same class.
Attendee - the letter about 'schools with a roll of 75 or less pupils' issued in November, feels like you're putting the target on these schools. There are 32 children zoned to Tullynessle, so we're not vulnerable. This letter to me says that we are being watched. Also, at the time there was no consultation with Tullynessle families about making the school one class school.

Maxine Booth - there are 32 children in the area but they are not attending the school, they chose to go somewhere else. Also, there was no consultation at the time to go from a two

class to one class school, because it is an operational decision. There is a formula used across all authorities - the number of children equals the number of teachers.

There was a discussion about a danger that all schools with a roll of 75 or less pupils are going to be closed.

Maxine Booth - across Scotland, there is a pupil population decline and at the moment we have 8000 spare primary places in our schools. We've got too many schools, and they're not full. The letter was issued to make people aware. Even our largest schools in urban areas up to 500 places are now declining to the roll of near 300. We also have to think about condition and suitability of our schools. With too many schools, we are spreading everything across all schools, staffing, resources, money to maintain the buildings. We need to think about the best learning environments for our children, it doesn't make sense to try and keep all of our schools open when they are not viable. We value rural education, but rural education is about education, it is about a place and not about a building.

Attendee - how the community can let you know that we want the school open. It is important for people to know that they can still apply for the school, especially with the new houses.

Maxine Booth - following this evening we need to make sure that people who aren't here tonight know. And we need to ask for alternatives to closure. Keeping the school open for eight children isn't an option. The school needs a viable number of children for a viable length of time, so that it gives reassurance to the community that it is going to be viable again and won't close again.

There was a discussion about possibility of having a nursery without a school.

Maxine Booth - tomorrow the committee is going to speak about deactivation/mothballing of nurseries and depending on what's decided that will be actioned in 2025 and you can then ask your questions.

There was a discussion about Tullynessle parents choosing different school, and their right to do so.

Deborah Masson - in response to how can we provide opportunity for families to say that they would like to go to Tullynessle. Rachael said that in January you would be able to say you wanted a place at Tullynessle. And as a QIO I will make it really clear at Alford and Keig that the Head Teachers share this information that it is possible to still make an application to Tullynessle.

Maxine Booth - out of zone children who would wish to come back to the school would also be allowed to do so.

Rachael Golding - in January a letter to all residents will be sent to advise how many potential primary ones indicated an interest in enrolling at the school, and if we were to

reopen the school, would you be interested on re-enrolling. Or do you know of a child who would want to come back. New houses will also receive this letter. We would also accept placing requests from other areas.

Maxine Booth - If we had 10 children that were out of zone that wanted to come back, that would make the school viable. Out of zone deadline is 15 March, by then we will know how many in zone children could enrol. It would apply to any year group. The community can also get the message out.

There was a discussion about proceeding with the statutory consultation and that the community feeling is that they were not heard and the children are not represented.

Mathew Smart - with my involvement we can go back to the table and you have an opportunity to be heard here.

Deborah Masson - I didn't know that we have a nursery without a Head Teacher, but I know we have other scenarios where the nursery is in a separate building. Following committee tomorrow, it is something I think can be discussed with families.

There was a discussion about nurseries without a Head Teacher and stand-alone nurseries.

Attendee - is it possible to make one school P1 to P3, and another school P4 to P7?

Maxine Booth - tomorrow night we have a meeting where we are proposing that. One school is going over capacity and the other school is dropping lower than eight. We are proposing a merger, and one school would be an infant school and the other a junior school, using this terminology. Some parents are supporting this proposal and others are opposed as they don't want their children to be split up. But there are educational benefits to it. We have been working with children, parents and working groups. If this is what you want, we will do options appraisal for that and we will share it with you. A decision needs to be made if you wish to pause the statutory consultation and continue mothballing to see if the new houses will be built and if they will generate any children? Within a year you can think of other options, do we want a nursery, or do we want Keig School to split.

Attendee - there was a Braemar Head Teacher overseeing Ballogie Nursery since the Finzean head teacher is at Alehousewells so it is an option. But if it is a child protection issue, how are those children different from ours? Talking about child protection and taking children out with their communities - the Head Teacher at Towie asked for an address for my son, in case of a snow day. I couldn't give that address because that is not our community. That is the biggest child protection issue for me, and this needs to be considered. That hasn't been thought for rural schools at all. And very likely it is going to happen that I won't be able to get to my four year old son because of snow.

Maxine Booth - yes, and it is across our schools within their own zone areas.

This conversation doesn't end today. We will continue. But start thinking about other options and alternatives, get the message out to people who are not here tonight, and share the other options with us. The minutes will be shared on the Engagement HQ website.

Attendee - if the statutory consultation process is stopped, how can we get these ideas brought forward to the table?

Maxine Booth - this is a pre-engagement before the actual statutory consultation and pre-engagement can go on two years, until we have the best option liked by the community and then we can try to do that, for example, if you want to use the Tullynessle building to be just a nursery, then you can't have the schools in that, and the school would need to be closed through the statutory consultation.

Attendee - Keig School needs help with the influx of numbers.

Deborah Masson - that has already started following the last meeting. But I can engage further following this evening.

Maxine Booth - during the drop-in session in October I spoke with concerned parents and passed that on to Deborah. But we need to remember, at Keig it wasn't just down to the Tullynessle children, it was large influx of P1 pupils.

Attendee - but the process was too quick and teachers didn't have a chance to get to know the children.

Maxine Booth - that's why we listened to the parents, I was speaking with parents at the last meeting as I wanted to find out what the experience was like for them and the children. I hear from parents that were moving to Keig and those who were already at Keig. We want to know what we could do better. We have learnt a lot since 2013, but communities want different things, you want a statutory consultation, and another community want to be mothballed.

Attendee - we wanted to go to statutory because we were ignored. Our local Councillors didn't communicate with us. Director of Education ignored us, only one ward Councillor turned up to feedback everything we have said to the Director, and we know that through Freedom of Information request. We didn't see the others either. The statutory consultation would allow us to have a voice. Nobody engaged with us in a respectful way, and we want to feel heard or valid.

Maxine Booth - and this is what tonight is about, we want to keep these conversations ongoing. It is an official channel. We don't just leave communication after mothballing, we need to keep engaging. It can be done through email, online, or face to face, with parents, children and other interested groups. We want to know the voice of the community and this is when Matthew comes in.

Attendee - who is looking after the building, with the heating turned off, potential burst pipes. In the future, if the school is to be opened, will it actually be maintained?

There was discussion about maintaining the building and outdoor areas and protecting the fabric of the building.

Maxine Booth - Property have a maintenance programme in place, and we will liaise with Property colleagues to give you more details. However, if we decide that we've got enough children to reopen the school, it's not going to happen within a day, it would be a process making sure the building and grounds are fit for purpose.

Attendee - if you did have enough children, when would the school open?

Maxine Booth - the usual process would be P1 admissions in January and out of zone applications with the deadline of 15 March, so we would be looking at August start.

Attendee - a Tullynessle child who is to start P1 next summer, which school would they be zoned to?

Maxine Booth - they would have to apply for Tullynessle, if this is what they want, if not, they can apply for Keig of Alford Schools.

Rachael Goldring - they can choose any school, but Keig of Alford are nominated schools and they would get transport to those schools.

Attendee - how long does the statutory process take?

Rachael Goldring - a statutory consultation must run for 30 days term time, but we usually run it for two months, because of in service days or bad weather days, so from start to finish, it's about nine months, because there are various government stages that it needs to go through.

There was a discussion about whether a statutory consultation should be launched or not or whether it should be launched for the school or for the nursery only. Opinions varied. There were voices that the community no longer trusted the Council.

Maxine Booth - we're going to have to build that trust back, because this is an important process that we need to get right and we need to do that together to get it right.

Matthew Smart - the Council has many departments and somebody said that they emailed the Learning Estates, and half the Learning Estates Team is in this room. So, when you email the Learning Estates, they will answer as it is a very small team.

Further discussion about broken trust and local Councillors not being present at tonight's meeting took place.

Maxine Booth - we are always trying to be reflective and we want to get it right. Nobody wants to lose their school, but you need children to have a school. From our point of view, we want the right outcome at the end. We want to get it right for Tullynessle community, carers and also Early Years. And the Early Years' paper will be presented tomorrow. And whatever is decided tomorrow, this process will be activated for all areas across Aberdeenshire, including Tullynessle.

Attendee - why do you have to decide now whether to stop the statutory consultation process or not?

Maxine Booth - once it's launched, we are in it. We produce proposal, we have a 30 day term time consultation, then a decision is made, and then potentially school permanently closed. If we go ahead with the statutory consultation, we will launch it before the summer. We wouldn't have this pre-engagement if it hadn't been requested by Tullynessle Parent Action Group. That's why we've been having pre-engagement sessions.

Attendee - that should've been made clear earlier.

Attendee - it should've been mapped out in May, during mothballing.

Maxine Booth - that's why we had the drop-in session in October, and we had the timeline.

Attendee - it was too late, we should've been explained how this process looks like at the time when the school was mothballed.

Maxine Booth - we did it separate because it could've been too much information on top of the mothballing. But I've acknowledged what you have said.

Attendee - you are watching the school rolls over time, so why somebody didn't say, there 37 children in this area but they are choosing not to go to the school? There must be reason for that.
Maxine Booth - we know the reasons that people write down on placing requests. They don't have to give their reason as to why they are applying for an out of zone placement, but when they do, we have to take that as being their true reason. We know the range of reasons why people choose other schools.

Attendee - so you just sit there watching a school go downhill and do nothing.

Maxine Booth - if a parent put on their application that they want to leave because they were not happy about X, Y and Z, then we would report it to the Quality Improvement Officer and they would have a discussion with the school. Tullynessle was not expected to go that route; however, there were number of families moved at the same time.

Deborah Masson - we can only do so much as an education authority. We can't fix everything, like relationships within the community. But I can work with the school to improve

the quality of the education. It depends on how openly you share real reasons with the right people. Sometimes I get feedback during my engagement through quality assurance and quality improvement visits or during parent council meetings or it may be a formal complaint. So, there's lots of different ways that we find things out. Taking a child out of a school is a parental choice.

Maxine Booth - we cannot say to a family, you must stay there.

Attendee - but you know the numbers and you've let it get down.

Mathew Smart - we're talking about place based approaches. In my discussions, other issues within the community may become apparent that indirectly affect the school.

Maxine Booth - we need to close this meeting, but it doesn't mean that this conversation is going to close. There's information about the engagement page and the QR code where you can find a lot of information about school forecasts, statutory consultation and where the minutes will be placed. We've got comment cards here, but you can also email us. I hope you find tonight useful. Thank you for your participation tonight. Please share with others and remember to submit any additional suggestions by the stated deadline.

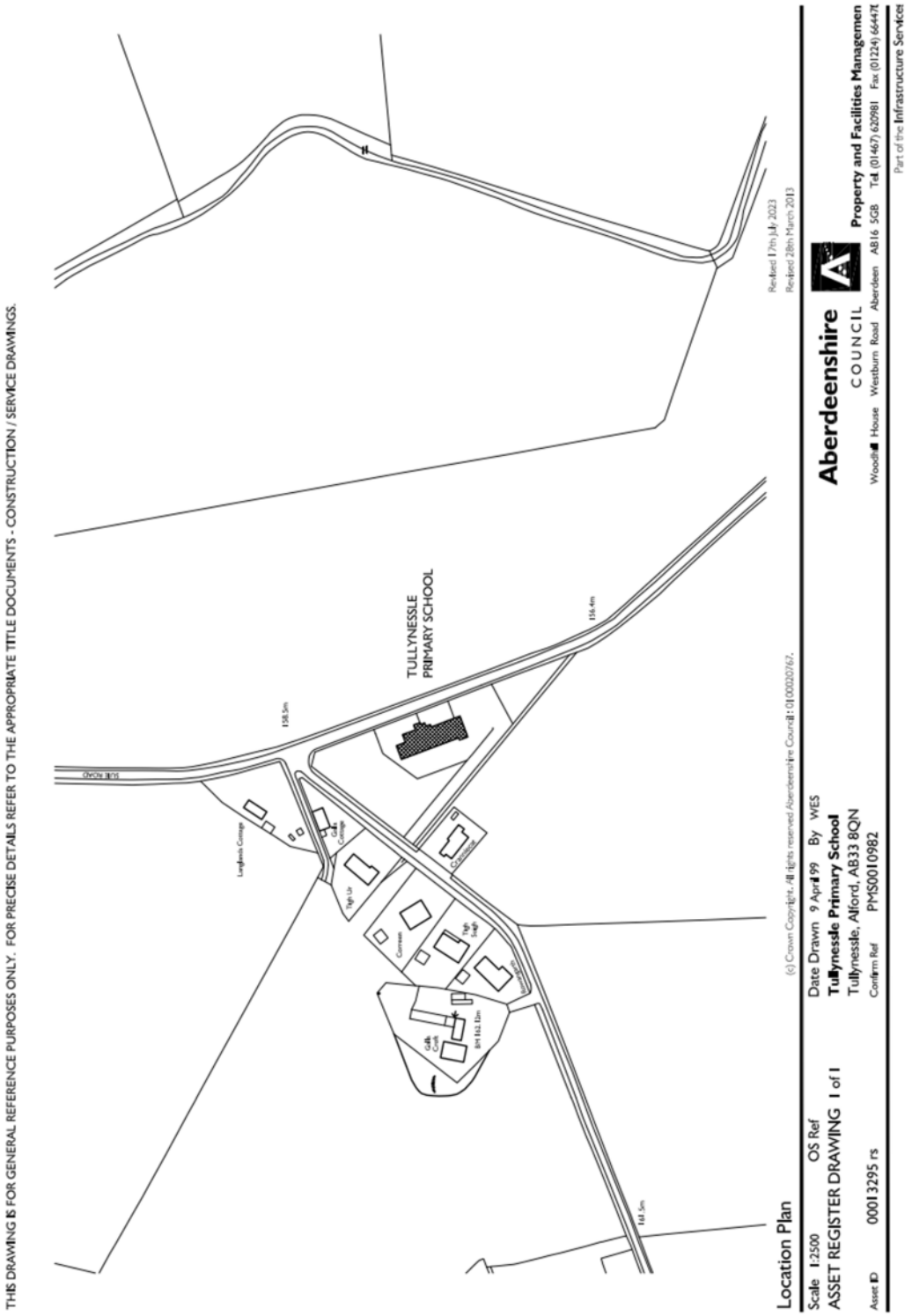
Meeting has concluded.

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

From mountain to sea

Appendix A2

Tullynessle School Floorplan



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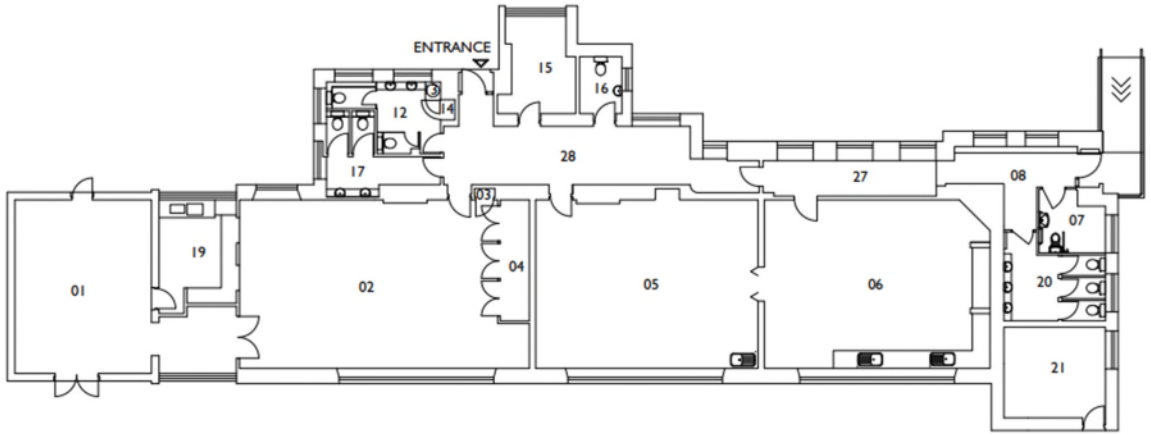

Floor Plan

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Revised 17th July 2023
Revised 28th March 2013

Scale NTS OS Ref
ASSET REGISTER DRAWING 1 of 2

Asset ID 00013295 rf

Date Drawn 9 April 99 By WES
Tullynessle Primary School
Tullynessle, Alford, AB33 8QN
Confirm Ref PMS0010982

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Tullynessle Primary School - Record Floor Plan

Educational Areas

Room Number	Room Description	sqm
Main Building		
01	Store	44.9
02	Dining/general purpose room	69.7
03	Store	0.3
04	Store	5.4
05	Classroom	58.4
06	Nursery	58.4
08	Nursery Cloaks	10.3

Ancillary Areas

Room Number	Room Description	sqm
Main Building		
07	Disabled toilet	5.8
12	Boys toilet	8.7
13	Cyclinder CPD	0.4
14	Switchgear	0.5
15	Office/staffroom	9.8
16	Staff toilet	3.7
17	Girls Toilet	9.4
19	Servery	12.8
20	Girls toilets	11.5
21	Plantroom	14.6

Circulation Areas

Room Number	Room Description	sqm
Main Building		
28	Corridor	27.7
27	Corridor	9.4

Main BuildingTotal Educational Area = 247.4

Main Building Total Ancillary Area = 77.2

Main Building Total Circulation Area = 27.7

Total Gross Internal Floor Areas
Main Building = 390.2

Floor Plan - Text

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Revised 17th July 2023
Revised 28th March 2013

Scale NTS OS Ref
ASSET REGISTER DRAWING 2 of 2

Date Drawn 9 April 99 By WES
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Tullynessle, Alford, AB33 8QN

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