Shaping Places for Wellbeing

Appendix I - Tullynessle School Place and Wellbeing Assessment

Tullynessle School Place and Wellbeing Assessment Report

22/05/2025

About the report

This is a report of a Place and Wellbeing Assessment held in May 2025 to discuss the changing school provision and mothballing of Tullynessle school in the Marr area of Aberdeenshire. The assessment aims to evaluate how the proposal may impact on the health and wellbeing of the local communities, using a place-based approach to consider both immediate and longer-term effects. The assessment process aims to develop recommendations that will support and increase the development of positive opportunities, whilst also recognising and addressing any unintended negative consequences. A Place and Wellbeing Assessment involves a workshop pulling together expertise and perspectives from a range of attendees to consider how a plan, policy or decision impacts on delivering a place that enables wellbeing and reduces inequality. To do this, attendees consider the impact on each of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and those who are experiencing inequality in that place. This paper is the output of one of these assessments.

Below is the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes Wheel from the Shaping Places framework, which illustrates the key factors evaluated during the assessment:

The wheel highlights the interconnected aspects of place and wellbeing, focusing on elements such as housing quality, community cohesion, economic opportunities, environmental

sustainability, and access to services. Each segment of the wheel represents a crucial component that contributes to overall wellbeing and equity within a community. More information can be found here.

To develop a better understanding about inequalities in the identified locations, the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme reviewed quantitative data, using information provided by the Public Health Scotland's Local Intelligence Support Team (LIST) as well as the statistical summary reports developed by Aberdeenshire Council's data analysts. This quantitative data was enhanced, through qualitative information exploration and gathering, conducted by Education & Children's Services' Community Link Lead, which aimed to develop a context for the interpretation of the data and to sense check the key inequalities highlighted in the quantitative information. This data and information were used to highlight the people within the local area who are being impacted most by inequalities that can lead to poor health and wellbeing. The recommended process for gathering data can be followed through this guide.

The data for the Clashindarroch Intermediate Zone, which covers Tullynessle at the time of the assessment, highlighted seven key areas of focus. The possible inequalities identified were:

- Access Deprivation
- Connectivity (Physical and Digital)
- Distance to Public Green Space
- Food Vulnerability
- Transport Time to Local Amenities
- Premature Births
- Maternal Obesity

Navigating the document

Read the Background to changing school provision and mothballing of Tullynessle Primary School proposal (Pages 4 & 5)

Links to the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme (Page 5)

Read the Report Summary (Pages 5&6) for an overview of the key themes from the

assessment.

Find the Recommendations summary table (Pages 8-10)

Read Appendix 1: Groups (Pages 11 – 21) for further detail of the discussion relating to impacts on specific population groups at greatest risk of experiencing inequalities.

Read Appendix 2: Discussion of Outcomes by Theme (Page 21-38) for further detail. It lists the key evidence and research and a summary of the discussion that took place.

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Appendix 3: Lists the Participants (Page 38)

Background to changing school provision and mothballing of Tullynessle Primary School

Tullynessle School, a small rural primary school with an attached nursery, has long been a valued part of its local community. However, declining pupil numbers led to concerns about its long-term viability. The decision to mothball Tullynessle School was primarily influenced by a significant drop in the school roll, reaching a point where the school could no longer be considered sustainable. Under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, mothballing is only appropriate in very limited circumstances and must be reviewed at least annually. In May 2024, the Director of Education & Children's Services formally decided to mothball the school, with the arrangement taking effect from the start of the new term in August 2024. Following this decision, most of the children previously attending Tullynessle were enrolled at Keig School. The associated nursery was also mothballed due to the absence of a head teacher to provide the necessary oversight. During the process, the Education and Children's Services received a request from the Tullynessle Parent Action Committee requiring the Council to

move directly to statutory consultation on the future of the school.

Links to the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme

The ambition of the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme is to improve Scotland's wellbeing by reducing the significant inequality in the health of its people. The Shaping Places objective focusses on the evidenced impact that the places where we live, work and relax have on our health and wellbeing. This impact can be positive or negative and the programme aims to ensure these unintended consequences are fully considered when we make decisions about a place. Our objective is to support delivery of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes. A process used for doing so is a Place and Wellbeing Assessment. This paper is the output of one of these assessments. A 'How to Guide' for Place and Wellbeing Assessments has been designed to support others to undertake their own assessments. There is high-level evidence and research that sits behind our Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and links to health and wellbeing. Full details on all of this evidence can be found on our Wiki page on the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Knowledge Hub. You will find some of this evidence listed in the body of the report.

Report Summary

The Place and Wellbeing Assessment of the changing school provision and mothballing of Tullynessle Primary School examines the challenges and opportunities facing both communities in the context of the possible merger. In the assessment there were several overarching themes identified as outlined below:

Community Impact and Identity

Tullynessle School and its nursery played a central role in fostering a sense of identity, connection, and belonging within the local community. Their mothballing removed a valued community anchor that had brought together generations through shared routines, informal networks, and place-based activities. The loss has been particularly felt by families with young children, older residents who participated in intergenerational events, and parents who previously relied on daily interactions at the school gate. The removal of these everyday community touchpoints has contributed to a diminished sense of place and cohesion.

Inequality and Access in a Rural Context

The mothballing of the school and nursery highlighted and deepened existing inequalities linked to rural living. The reduction in early years provision increased travel distances and placed additional burdens on families with limited access to transport or digital connectivity. Vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and those experiencing rural poverty, faced new or intensified barriers to education, childcare, and support. While data such as the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) may not fully capture rural hardship, the assessment revealed substantial hidden need and uneven access to services.

Gendered Impact and Strains on Wellbeing

The closure of local provision placed added pressure on family routines, mental health, and financial wellbeing. For many households, particularly those headed by women, longer school commutes, inflexible nursery hours, and the loss of informal support systems significantly disrupted day-to-day life. Women were disproportionately affected due to their roles as primary caregivers and their greater reliance on local childcare arrangements to sustain employment. Families with children who have additional support needs (ASN) also encountered challenges, with some children struggling to adapt to the sensory and social demands of a larger school environment.

Resources and Infrastructure

A recurring concern throughout the assessment was a lack of clear communication and understanding during the mothballing process. Tullynessle Parent Action Committee insisted the Council proceed directly to statutory consultation on the future of the school, they chose this route under the belief that it would help safeguard the nursery. This contributed to a breakdown in trust between the community and decision-makers. Despite these challenges, there is interest in exploring future community use of the school building. With early engagement, transparent processes, and support for stewardship, there is potential to move forward in a way that continues to serve local wellbeing.

Recommendations

For ease of reference, all the recommendations contained in this report are outlined in the table below:

Place and Wellbeing Theme	Place and Wellbeing Outcome	Recommendation
Movement	**Active Travel Public Transport Travel and Parking**	1. Aberdeenshire Council Roads and Infrastructure Services will explore options for safe walking and cycling routes between Tullynessle, Keig, and Montgarrie with support from Marr Area Office, SUSTRANS, and Marr Paths Groups.
Movement	**Active Travel Public Transport Travel and Parking**	2. Aberdeenshire Council Transport Team will investigate flexible, demand-responsive rural transport solutions, such as community minibuses or shared school transport schemes.
Movement	**Active Travel Public Transport Travel and Parking**	3. Keig School & Parent Council will implement and promote traffic safety measures at drop-off/pick-up times, including staggered timings and signage, with support from local police and Aberdeenshire Council Roads Department.
Movement	**Active Travel Public Transport Travel and Parking**	4. Keig School and the Active Schools Team will expand Bikeability training and promote cycling to school, with parental engagement for transport solutions.
Movement	**Active Travel Public Transport Travel and Parking**	5. Local residents, assisted by the Community Council, should establish community lift-share schemes and walking buses, promoted via schools and local groups.
Movement	**Active Travel Public Transport Travel and Parking**	6. Learning Estates will clarify school transport entitlement for all primary aged children living within the current catchment area if the school is permanently closed.
Spaces	**Streets and Spaces Natural Spaces Play and Recreation**	7. Property & Estates Team to investigate interim community access to outdoor spaces at Tullynessle School for play and nature-based activities.

Spaces	**Streets and Spaces Natural Spaces Play and Recreation**	8. Keig School and Early Years Team should facilitate nature-based learning in existing school and nursery grounds and local natural spaces with support from private learning providers.
Spaces	**Streets and Spaces Natural Spaces Play and Recreation**	9. Local community, with the support of environmental groups both national and local, should offer outdoor learning or holiday programmes to maintain access to nature for early years and organise family play and nature sessions using local greenspace.
Spaces	**Streets and Spaces Natural Spaces Play and Recreation**	10. Marr Area Manager's Team will facilitate funding applications for community greenspace enhancement and shared-use agreements via participatory budgeting support.
Resources	**Services and Support Work and Economy Housing and Community**	11. Aberdeenshire Council Early Years Team, with feedback from parents and staff, will work alongside nursery providers to consider adapting nursery session times to better reflect working patterns of local parents.
Resources	**Services and Support Work and Economy Housing and Community**	12. Cluster schools & Head Teachers will continue support for children with ASN needs, ensuring availability of quiet and sensory spaces and smooth transitions.
Resources	**Services and Support Work and Economy Housing and Community**	13. Aberdeenshire Council Economic Development Team, with Community Planning Support, will engage with families on rural employment challenges, especially those impacted by childcare inflexibility.
Resources	**Services and Support Work and Economy Housing and Community**	14. Keig School will identify and support families experiencing rural poverty through trusted relationships, referral to hardship funds, and low-cost initiatives and work with local action groups to provide community-led sessions on accessing grants, benefits, and services.
Resources	**Services and Support Work and Economy Housing and Community**	15. Aberdeenshire Council Planning Services will clarify local housing development pipeline and engage with residents to manage expectations and perceptions.
Civic	**Identity and Belonging Feeling Safe**	16. Aberdeenshire Council Education & Children's Services will identify methods to continue to improve transparency around school decisions, including mothballing and service changes.

Civic	**Identity and Belonging** **Feeling Safe**	17. Keig School should identify methods to increase engagement opportunities for parents who don't regularly attend the school gate, like family events or digital communication use.
Civic	**Identity and Belonging** **Feeling Safe**	18. Tullynessle hall and voluntary groups should host intergenerational and social events to build belonging across former catchments.
Civic	**Identity and Belonging** **Feeling Safe**	19. Aberdeenshire Transport Safety, supported by local policing teams, will support local community safety initiatives, especially around winter road safety and isolated travel routes.
Stewardship	**Care and Maintenance** **Influence and Control**	20. Aberdeenshire Council Property Teams and Facility Management will maintain Tullynessle School to ensure it remains viable during mothballing.
Stewardship	**Care and Maintenance** **Influence and Control**	21. Marr Area Manager's Team should begin early dialogue with interested community parties about the potential for asset transfer if permanent closure proceeds.
Stewardship	**Care and Maintenance** **Influence and Control**	22. Community Council will explore and scope future community use of Tullynessle School building with mentoring from Development Trusts Association Scotland and existing successful local trusts, eg., Logie Coldstone Development trust.
Stewardship	**Care and Maintenance** **Influence and Control**	23. Marr Area Project Officer will lead on community capacity-building support, including sharing case studies from successful asset transfers in other areas.
Stewardship	**Care and Maintenance** **Influence and Control**	24. Learning Estates Team will assist Keig School in addressing constraints related to the use of Keig Hall facilities and revisiting agreements with hall custodians.

Next Steps

The recommendations in this report will be shared with the services and teams within Aberdeenshire Council, as well as external partners and community groups, who will have a strategic or operational role in reviewing the next steps for the changing school provision in Tullynessle. These recommendations should be reviewed to see what can be incorporated into the plans, based on the decision made to mothball the school. That review will include identifying the aspects that require further consideration, and where collaboration is needed to take them forward. It is recognised that not all recommendations will be suitable to take forward due to time, capacity or other constraints.

Appendix 1

Discussion of specific population groups and recommendations

To consider the impact of the decision to mothball the school on both the Tullynessle Community and the wider surrounding area, the group began the assessment with a discussion of the specific population groups that are at risk of experiencing the greatest impacts caused by inequalities. The population groups were clustered together to facilitate the discussion within the time restrictions of the assessment.

Older People, Children and Young People

Here we explored the impact of mothballing Tullynessle School and nursery on two age groups at opposite ends of life: children and older adults. It highlighted the value of the school's outdoor learning environment, the social and developmental challenges of transitioning to a larger setting — particularly for children with ASN — and the erosion of hyperlocal services that previously supported wellbeing among older adults. The emotional and logistical effects on parents, especially those facing

rural poverty, were also discussed, alongside concerns about being excluded from the decision-making process.

The discussion highlighted the significant impact of mothballing Tullynessle School and nursery on children, particularly those who valued the outdoor learning environment.

One participant emphasised that the nursery's closure restricts children's access to nature-based early learning and outdoor play, which was highly valued by the community. These natural spaces are not just learning environments but safe, familiar surroundings where children feel grounded and calm.

Another shared positive feedback from parents about the transition to Keig School, noting that children have enjoyed having more peers to work with and access to activities like the after-school football club. However, she also mentioned that the transition has required adaptation, especially for children with ASN (Additional Support Needs), who may find the larger school environment overwhelming. In larger settings, sensory overload can be more prevalent, and for some children, this may result in anxiety or behavioural challenges.

It was emphasised that the children from Tullynessle and Keig School have integrated well, and there is no longer a distinction between them. The children have formed new friendships and are getting along well. This positive social integration is a testament to both schools' efforts to foster inclusion. Additionally, it was noted that the transition to a larger school environment can benefit children in terms of preparing them for the move to secondary school, as they will be exposed to a larger cohort and more peers, making the transition smoother.

The impact on older people was also discussed, with a contributor mentioning that the school provided hyperlocal services that benefited older people in the area. The removal of these services can lead to increased inequalities and reduced access to local amenities for older adults. For instance, community events or intergenerational activities based at the school were opportunities for older residents to connect with younger people, contributing to a stronger sense of community cohesion and

purpose.

Community feedback was shared by several individuals, who noted that some Keig parents found the transition challenging because they felt they were not involved in the decision-making process. This has led to feelings of frustration and a sense of disconnect from the school. Some parents expressed that they “didn’t know it was happening until it had already been decided,” which has affected trust in the system.

The group also highlighted the importance of building trust with families to support them effectively, especially those facing rural poverty. They mentioned efforts to provide resources like uniform recycling services and support for families eligible for grants. These services are vital in rural areas where cost of living can be higher, and where pride or stigma may prevent families from seeking help.

Women, Men (including trans men/women and issues relating to pregnancy and maternity)

This section considered the gendered impact of the school and nursery mothballing, especially on women and caregivers. It highlights how reduced access to local childcare increases isolation, limits informal parental support networks, and affects the ability to maintain employment. The burden of longer travel and reduced flexibility in nursery hours disproportionately falls on women, deepening existing gender inequalities. The loss of daily contact at the school gate has also contributed to a sense of disconnection from school life and reduced participation.

The conversation around women, men, and issues relating to pregnancy and maternity highlighted several key points. One participant pointed out that the mothballing of Tullynessle School and nursery has public health implications, particularly concerning maternal and child health inequalities. The closure reduces access to nearby support networks and informal parent spaces, which can increase isolation and reduce well-being. This is particularly significant for women, who often

bear the brunt of childcare responsibilities. The reduction in childcare options or changes in their flexibility can result in women having to reduce their working hours, thereby exacerbating gender employment inequality. Additionally, the logistics of getting children to nursery or school, where school transport is not available, which often falls to women, becomes more challenging with increased travel distances.

Another added that some parents, particularly those who previously drove their children to Tullynessle, now feel a disconnect from Keig School because they are not at the school gate daily. This has led to feelings of isolation and a sense of being less involved in the school community. It was mentioned that efforts are being made to address this by creating more opportunities for these parents to engage with the school.

The discussion also touched on the broader implications of these changes for the community. The loss of local nursery provision means that parents now have to travel further, which can be particularly challenging for those with limited access to transport. This situation underscores the need for flexible and accessible childcare options to support working parents, particularly mothers, and to ensure that they can maintain their employment and well-being.

The changes brought by mothballing have had a tangible impact on women, particularly those juggling childcare and work. Feelings of disconnection and isolation, alongside the challenges of increased travel, have compounded emotional and economic pressures. Addressing these issues requires continued efforts to engage with parents who are no longer present at the school gate through inclusive family events and digital communications. Supporting flexible and accessible childcare provision that reflects local working patterns is also essential to protect employment and wellbeing, and future planning should prioritise reducing these logistical and social barriers for women and families.

Disabled People (including physical disability, learning disability, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, long term medical conditions, mental health problems), Carers (including parents, single parents, and elderly carers)

Here the group explored how the transition to a larger school environment has affected children and parents with disabilities, focusing on accessibility, sensory support, and transport. The discussion covered both the positive efforts at Keig School to provide ASN support and the challenges of longer, less safe commutes for those with mobility impairments. The importance of trusted relationships, inclusive practice, and universal support strategies was strongly emphasised.

The discussion around disabled people and disability focused on several important aspects. A participant highlighted the efforts made at Keig School to support children with additional support needs (ASN). It was mentioned that the school has adapted its facilities to be more accessible, including creating safe, quiet spaces for children with sensory impairments. The school has disabled access and a disabled toilet, which are used during community events as well. The group emphasised the importance of universal support strategies to help children with ASN and sensory impairments cope in the school environment. It was also noted that having a larger school with more children requiring ASN support makes it easier to timetable and provide the necessary support.

A contributor added that longer and potentially less safe commutes can increase exclusion risk for children and parents with mobility impairments. They pointed out that the centralisation of learning can limit participation in education and community life for those with physical or learning impairments. In response, another shared that the school works closely with families to support their needs, including providing transport for parents who cannot drive to attend meetings. They mentioned that the school is a trusted referrer to local services supporting families facing fuel poverty, and works to reduce the cost of the school day for families.

The discussion also touched on the impact of the transition from Tullynessle to Keig School on children with ASN. A participant noted that while the larger school environment can be overwhelming for some children, it also provides more

opportunities for support and preparation for the transition to secondary school. She mentioned that the school works with young carers and provides one-to-one support through external groups.

The group discussed how Keig School has made significant strides in supporting children with ASN and ensuring facilities are accessible for those with disabilities. However, the increased travel distance remains a barrier to inclusion, particularly for families without transport or for those with physical impairments. Continued commitment to quiet and sensory spaces, supported transitions, and working with external groups such as young carers' services is essential. Additionally, addressing exclusion through accessible transport options and school-led outreach for parents with mobility issues were raised as measures that will help ensure that disabled people and their families can participate fully in school and community life.

Minority Ethnic People, Refugees and Asylum Seekers and People with different religions or beliefs

Although Tullynessle has limited ethnic diversity, this section considered the broader ethos of inclusion and cultural competence. Keig School was recognised for its positive track record in welcoming children from all backgrounds and ensuring that difference is neither stigmatised nor highlighted unnecessarily.

The discussion around minority ethnic groups was relatively brief, as it was noted that there are not many minority or ethnic people in the Tullynessle area. One participant mentioned that, to their knowledge, there were no minority ethnic children who had joined Keig School from Tullynessle. However, they emphasised that Keig School has always been inclusive and accepting of children from different ethnic backgrounds. They shared that the school has children from other ethnicities and that the families and children do not see it as anything different, indicating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

A participant added that in his experience working with the community in this part of Marr, the population is predominantly naturalised Scottish and British people. Therefore, considerations around English as a second language or other specific needs

related to minority ethnic groups were not flagged through the data points.

While no immediate needs were identified relating to minority ethnic groups in this area, Keig School's inclusive ethos provides a strong foundation for any future demographic changes. Continued staff awareness, inclusive curriculum development, and opportunities to celebrate cultural diversity will ensure that any new pupils or families from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and supported.

People living in poverty and people on low income, People experiencing homelessness, People involved in the criminal justice system, and People with low literacy/numeracy

Poverty was discussed extensively, with attention to both visible and hidden forms of rural deprivation. Issues raised included the high financial burden of transport, digital exclusion, reluctance to seek help, and the misleading nature of SIMD data in affluent-seeming rural areas. Trust between schools and families, access to financial support, and multi-agency collaboration were highlighted as essential strategies.

The discussion around poverty and people living in poverty was extensive and covered various aspects. A contributor highlighted that removing local services and increasing travel time and costs disproportionately affect people already suffering from inequalities related to poverty. They mentioned that parents are struggling with the logistics of transporting children to different schools and nurseries, which adds to their financial burden. The rural nature of Tullynessle already embeds certain inequalities, and removing hyperlocal services exacerbates these issues.

Another participant shared their experiences at Keig School, noting that rural poverty is a significant concern. They emphasised that the SIMD data can be misleading for rural areas like Alford, which appear to have high levels of affluence but still face rural poverty. It was noted that the Head Teacher works closely with families to build trust and support them in various ways, such as being a trusted referrer to local services for fuel poverty support and reducing the cost of the school day. It was mentioned that poverty is a challenging issue for families to admit, requiring a lot of trust between the school and the families. Contributors also highlighted the importance of knowing

which children are eligible for free school meals and working with families to ensure their needs are met.

One participant suggested exploring links with organisations like Gordon Rural Action and Networks of Wellbeing, which provide various forms of support, including baby banks, cash bursaries, and mental health support. They emphasised the importance of developing trust with families and recognising the issue of the working poor, who may have multiple jobs but still struggle financially. It was also mentioned there was need to support the infrastructure and make connections with organisations that can help.

A participant added that the early years settings also mirror the support provided at Keig School, with practitioners building trust with parents and offering various forms of assistance. They emphasised the ongoing nature of the issue and the need for continued support.

The mothballing of Tullynessle School has exacerbated existing inequalities for families already struggling with the costs and logistics of rural life. Additional burdens such as travel expenses, childcare inflexibility, and limited public transport contribute to persistent hardship. Building on trusted relationships, Keig School and cluster partners should continue to support families through access to hardship funds, free school meal registration, uniform banks, and referrals to partner organisations. Engagement with local networks such as Gordon Rural Action and Networks of Wellbeing can enhance this wraparound support, while ongoing identification of the working poor and their needs must be prioritised.

People in remote, rural and/or island locations

The discussion around people in remote or rural locations was detailed and covered various challenges and considerations. Conversation highlighted the layered disadvantages experienced in rural areas, including lack of public transport, poor

active travel infrastructure, and increased dependence on car ownership. Participants described the erosion of local services as particularly acute in rural contexts, where centralisation increases cost, isolation, and risk — particularly for children, non-drivers, and older adults.

A participant emphasised that centralising services often assumes high connectivity, which is not the case in rural areas like Tullynessle. This creates a double disadvantage, as existing rural inequalities are compounded by the lack of accessible services. They highlighted the need to consider these pre-existing inequalities when making decisions about connectivity and service provision.

A member of the group mentioned that there is no public transport in Tullynessle, which further exacerbates the challenges faced by residents. This lack of public transport means that people are more reliant on running a car, adding to their financial burden. They also noted that the closure of Montgarrie Bridge has increased traffic, raising safety concerns for cycling and walking in the area.

Another shared that Keig School faces challenges with parking and traffic congestion, particularly during drop-off and pick-up times. They mentioned that the school has had to work closely with the parent council to address safety concerns and manage traffic effectively. The group touched on the importance of creating safe routes for cycling and walking, although the current infrastructure does not support this well.

A participant pointed out that active travel is a problem in the area, as there are no safe cycle or walk paths between Tullynessle, Keig, and Montgarrie. They mentioned that they have met with Aberdeenshire Council, but there are no plans for improvements. It was also noted that despite having expert support from a consultancy funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, there has been no progress on active travel aspects.

It was suggested exploring links with organisations that have expertise in path development, such as the Marr Paths Development organisation. They emphasised the importance of capturing community enthusiasm and supporting them to take action before the situation deteriorates further. A participant also mentioned the

need to engage with the community early on to discuss feasible options and provide examples of successful projects in other areas.

Mothballing the school has compounded transport and infrastructure challenges for the Tullynessle area, increasing the daily burden on rural households and diminishing access to education and services. These issues can be partially mitigated through investment in rural connectivity, including demand-responsive transport and school travel policies that reflect local needs. Partnerships with groups such as Marr Paths and SUSTRANS can help communities pursue active travel improvements, while support for community lift-share schemes, walking buses, and local engagement on traffic safety can reduce isolation and enhance wellbeing in remote areas.

Staff including people with different work patterns (part time and full time, short term, job share and seasonal)

This section focuses on the impact of the school's mothballing on staff wellbeing, job security, and role continuity. Initially, anxiety was high regarding redeployment and the future of nursery and support staff. However, the discussion revealed that strong communication, familiarity with cluster working, and successful transitions have resulted in mostly positive outcomes for staff.

The discussion around the protected group of staff during the assessment covered several important points. A participant mentioned that initially, staff were very concerned about where they would be placed and the security of their jobs. However, once they knew their jobs were safe and where they would be placed, they felt more relieved and happier. It was noted that the transition has been successful, particularly for nursery staff.

This was echoed by another contributor, stating that the initial mention of the mothballing was quite stressful for staff. However, they had been in touch with the previous headteacher of Tullynessle, who has settled well into their new role. One participant also mentioned that the Additional Support for Learning (ASL) teachers and Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) are cluster resources, so they were already working within the cluster, which helped with continuity for the children and ensured

that staff were already familiar with the schools they were transitioning to.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the mothballing process, most staff have transitioned well due to proactive communication and the existing cluster staffing model. Continuing this support is essential — ensuring job security, clear timelines, and professional development opportunities across the cluster. Maintaining relationships between staff and families during future transitions will also help sustain trust and continuity for children.

Appendix 2

Summary of Discussion and Recommendations by Place and Wellbeing Outcome Theme

Movement

Active Travel
Everyone can: • easily move around using good-quality, accessible, well-maintained and safe segregated wheeling, walking and cycling routes and access secure bike parking. • wheel, walk and cycle through routes that connect homes, destinations and public transport, are segregated from, and prioritised above, motorised traffic and are part of a local green network.

Evidence and research:

- Health benefits of active travel, such as increased physical activity levels, will vary in different groups.[1]
- Active travel can increase social interactions.[1]
- More active travel could lead to increased exposure to air pollutants or more accidents, but the health benefits of active travel, for example from physical activity, outweigh the risks caused by air pollution or accidents.[1]
- Walking or cycling to school helps children achieve a healthy weight and the beneficial effects may be greater for children from deprived areas.[2]

- Protected bike lanes and secure bike parking increases diversity and inclusion.[3]

Public Transport
Everyone has access to a sustainable, affordable, accessible, available, appropriate, and safe public transport service.

Evidence and research:

- Public transport use has the potential to improve access to services and facilities and connect communities.[4]
- Public transport should be accessible, available, affordable and appropriate.[4]

Traffic and Parking
Everyone can benefit from: • reducing traffic and traffic speeds in the community • traffic management and design, where traffic and car parking do not dominate or • prevent other uses of space and car parking is prioritised for those who don't have other options.

Evidence and research:

- Motorised transport has the potential to increase air and noise pollution and greenhouse gases.[4]
- The volume and speed of traffic and long commutes can be detrimental to health.[4]

[1] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

[2] Associations of active travel with adiposity among children and socioeconomic differentials: a longitudinal study | BMJ Open

[3] Women and Biking: A Case Study on the use of San Francisco Bike Lanes. University of California, Berkley).

[4] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

Summary of Discussion

The conversation around the movement theme, which includes active travel, public transport, and traffic & parking, covered several key points. A contributor highlighted that the mothballing of Tullynessle School has eliminated the option for parents and children to walk or cycle to school, as the alternative school is several miles away. This change has forced parents to rely on cars for nursery commutes, and reduced opportunities for active travel.

Another mentioned that Keig School is starting Bikeability training to prepare children for cycling. However, there are challenges for children who are bused to school, as getting bikes to school can be difficult. She also noted that parking is at a premium at Keig, and traffic safety is a concern, with some drivers speeding through the area.

A member of the discussion pointed out that there are no safe cycle or walk paths between Tullynessle, Keig, and Montgarrie, and there are no plans for improvements from Aberdeenshire Council Access.

A contributor stated that there is no public transport in the Tullynessle area, which means residents are more reliant on cars for transportation. This lack of public transport contributes to existing inequalities related to transport time to amenities and overall community well-being. Another emphasised that without public transport, people are more reliant on running a car, which adds to their bills and affects their mental health, parental employment, and overall well-being.

One member of the group shared an anecdote about the congestion caused by a late trade waste pickup, which coincided with school closing time. This situation highlighted the challenges of traffic management and parking at Keig School, especially during drop-off and pick-up times. They mentioned that parents sometimes block driveways or make it difficult for service vehicles to access properties.

A member of the discussion noted that with the closure of Montgarrie Bridge, there is much more traffic, raising safety issues for cycling and walking anywhere from Tullynessle to Forbes and Keig

Overall, the discussion highlighted the significant impact of the mothballing of Tullynessle School on active travel options, the reliance on cars due to the lack of public transport, and the challenges of traffic management and parking at Keig School. The need for improved infrastructure and safety measures for active travel and better public transport options were emphasised.

Recommendations:

1. Aberdeenshire Council Roads and Infrastructure Services will explore options for safe walking and cycling routes between Tullynessle, Keig, and Montgarrie with support in expertise, planning and funding new active travel infrastructure from Marr Area Office, SUSTRANS and Marr Paths Groups.

2. Aberdeenshire Council Transport Team will investigate flexible, demand-responsive rural transport solutions, such as community minibuses or shared school transport schemes.

3. Keig School & Parent Council will implement and promote traffic safety measures at drop-off/pick-up times, including staggered timings and signage, with support from local police and Aberdeenshire Council Roads Department.

4. Keig School and the Active Schools Team will expand Bikeability training and promote cycling to school, with parental engagement for transport solutions.

5. Local residents, assisted by the community council, should establish community lift-share schemes and walking buses, promoted via schools and local groups.

6. Learning Estates, working with Aberdeenshire Council Transport Team, will clarify with the community that the school transport policy will consider all children from Tullynessle area for free transport if the school is permanently closed.

Spaces

Streets and Spaces
Everyone can access: • buildings, streets and public spaces that create an attractive place to use, enjoy and interact with others. • streets and spaces that are well-connected, well-designed and maintained, providing multiple functions and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups.

Evidence and research:

- Attractive neighbourhoods can improve mental wellbeing[5]

Natural Space
Everyone can: • access good-quality natural spaces that support biodiversity and are well connected, well-designed, safe, and maintained, providing multiple functions and amenities to meet the varying needs of different population groups. • be protected from environmental hazards including air/water/soil pollution or the risk of flooding. • access community food growing opportunities and prime quality agricultural land is protected.

Evidence and research:

- Natural spaces can provide mental health benefits.[6]
- Experts hypothesise that natural spaces can provide a sense of character and distinctiveness to a place.[6]
- There are wider environmental benefits to increasing natural space which can protect population health.[7]
- Natural spaces can have an impact on health through facilitation of physical activity, improved social interactions/relationships and stress reduction.[8]
- Natural spaces can encourage social interactions and a sense of community and belonging.[9]

Play and Recreation
Everyone can access a range of high quality, safe, well-maintained, accessible places with opportunities for play and recreation to meet the varying needs of different population groups and the community itself.

Evidence and research:

- Play is important to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and wellbeing of young children.[6]
- There are health benefits of undertaking play and recreation in outdoor environments, in particular natural spaces. There are specific benefits for children such as the development of motor skills, understanding risk and environmental awareness.[10]

[5] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

[6] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

[7] INHERIT: exploring triple-win solutions for living, moving and consuming that encourage behavioural change, protect the environment, promote health and health equity

[8] Local Action on Health Inequalities

[9] Hartig T, Mitchell R, de Vries S, et al. Nature and health. Annual Review of Public Health 2014;35:207–228

[10] Play Scotland: Getting it right for play power of play: an evidence base

Summary of discussion:

The mothballing of the school has led to the loss of both a learning space and an

accessible green space for play and nature-based activity. The school grounds were valued by the community for their informal access and environmental quality. While alternative schools have green space, the unique setting and flexibility of Tullynessle were missed.

The conversation around spaces highlighted several key points and concerns regarding the impact of the mothballing of Tullynessle Primary School on the community's access to recreational and natural spaces. A Tullynessle resident emphasised that the school grounds had always been a well-used community resource for sports and play, with families and children frequently using the area for football, picnics, and other activities. However, with the school now mothballed, these facilities have been taped off, and the grass is no longer maintained, leading to concerns about the loss of this valuable community asset.

One participant noted that while Keig School has similar outdoor facilities, including a football pitch and play areas, the accessibility of these spaces is somewhat limited due to the layout of the school grounds. They mentioned that the school is working to make these areas as accessible as possible and highlighted the use of the nearby Forbes Estate for outdoor learning and activities. This collaboration with the estate provides additional opportunities for outdoor education and recreation, although it does not fully replace the loss of the Tullynessle facilities.

A participant raised the issue of the potential dereliction of the Tullynessle school grounds and the loss of the outdoor learning space that was highly valued by the community. They pointed out that the community had invested effort into maintaining the orchards and other outdoor areas, which are now at risk of being neglected. This concern was echoed by other participants, who stressed the importance of maintaining these spaces for the benefit of the community, particularly given the lack of other recreational facilities in the area.

The discussion also touched on the possibility of the community taking over the maintenance and use of the school grounds through an asset transfer. A member of the group suggested that engaging with the community early on to explore their

capacity and interest in such a transfer would be beneficial. They highlighted the need for support and guidance from organisations experienced in community asset transfers to ensure a smooth process. This approach could help preserve the recreational and natural spaces that are crucial for the well-being of the Tullynessle community.

Overall, the conversation underscored the significant impact of the school mothballing on the community's access to spaces for play, recreation, and outdoor learning. It highlighted the need for proactive measures to maintain these spaces and explore alternative solutions to ensure that the community continues to benefit from them.

Children and families have lost easy access to a natural, localised outdoor learning space. To address this gap, Aberdeenshire Council Property & Estates could support interim access to the Tullynessle grounds for community-led nature play. Schools and community groups, supported by environmental groups, both local and national, should explore shared use of natural spaces, holiday programmes, and family nature sessions, and pursue funding through participatory budgeting and community greenspace enhancement schemes.

Recommendations:

7. Property & Estates Team to investigate interim community access to outdoor spaces at Tullynessle School for play and nature-based activities.

8. Keig School and Early Years Team should facilitate nature-based learning in existing school and nursery grounds and local natural spaces with support from private learning providers.

9. Local community, with the support of environmental groups both national and local, should offer outdoor learning or holiday programmes to maintain access to nature for early years and organise family play and nature sessions using local greenspace.

10. Marr Area Manager's Team will facilitate funding applications for community greenspace enhancement and shared-use agreements via participatory budgeting support.

Resources

Services and Support

Everyone can access:

- health enhancing, accessible, affordable and well-maintained services, facilities and amenities. These are informed by community engagement, responsive to the needs and priorities of all local people.
- a range of spaces and opportunities for communities to meet indoors and outdoors.
- information and resources necessary for an included life in a range of digital and non- digital formats.

Evidence and research:

- Services and support can provide people with a sense of belonging to the community.[11]
- People need local facilities and services to live and enjoy healthy independent lives.[12]

Work and Economy

Everyone benefits equally from a local economy that provides:

- essential goods & services produced or procured locally
- good quality paid and unpaid work

- access to assets such as wealth & capital and the resources that enable people to participate in the economy such as good health and education
- a balanced value ascribed across sectors such as female dominated sectors and the non- monetary economy

Evidence and research:

- Volunteering can help increase feelings of self-esteem and provide a sense of purpose.[13]
- Volunteering has been associated with improved self-rated health, mental health, life satisfaction and wellbeing, and decreased depression and mortality.[13]
- Experts hypothesise that if a place is lively and vibrant it can provide work opportunities and will encourage people to visit the area.[13]

Housing and Community

Everyone has access to:

- a home that is affordable, energy efficient, high quality and provides access to private outdoor space.
- a variety of housing types, sizes and tenancies to meet the needs of the community. And of a sufficient density to sustain existing or future local facilities, services and amenities.
- a home that is designed and built to meet need and demand, is adaptable to changing needs and includes accessible/wheelchair standard housing.
- new homes that are located and designed to provide high levels of climate resilience and use sustainable materials and construction methods.
- homes that are designed to promote community cohesion.

Evidence and research:

- Good-quality affordable housing is associated with improved physical and mental health outcomes. Housing can impact on health in three main ways: physical factors, household factors and factors related to place and communities.[14]
- Vacant and derelict land can negatively impact on health.[14]

[11] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

[12] Compact, Walkable, Diverse Neighborhoods: Assessing Effects on Residents

[13] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

[14] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

Summary of discussion

This section reflects on the wider implications of the mothballing for services, childcare, economic participation, and community planning. Parents have experienced inflexible nursery hours, reduced income, and uncertainty about future local housing development. There is also an identified gap between official housing projections and local expectations.

One participant emphasised the unintended consequences of the nursery closing alongside the mothballing of Tullynessle School. This change has forced many families to reduce their working hours and incomes due to the inflexibility of nursery hours in alternative locations. The previous nursery at Tullynessle operated from 9:00 to 15:00, but the new nurseries have sessions from 8:00 to 13:00 and 13:00 to 17:00, requiring parents to use twice as many of their 1140 childcare hours to get the same results. This has reduced the flexibility for parents who need it the most.

A participant confirmed that there were 16 children at the Tullynessle nursery before the mothballing, and they have been placed in other nurseries such as Towie and Alford. However, the exact numbers and future projections for these placements are not entirely clear. A contributor added that the nursery team faces challenges in ensuring the demand for places is right, and the number of places across the area was in excess, making it a difficult situation overall.

There was a discussion about the disparity between the community's perception of planned housing developments and the official reports. The community believes there are housing developments in the pipeline, while the official report states there are no planned developments. The group agreed this discrepancy needs to be clarified to manage community expectations.

A contributor mentioned that in some areas where early learning provision was reduced, private nursery services developed as an alternative. This could be an opportunity to explore in the future for Tullynessle.

Reduced flexibility in childcare hours and associated financial pressures have disrupted family income and workforce participation. Aberdeenshire Early Years Team should engage with parents to adapt session times in response to local needs. Council Planning Services must clarify the housing development pipeline with transparent communication to manage expectations. Supporting private childcare provision in the area and encouraging community enterprise could also help plug gaps in early years service delivery.

Recommendations:

11. Aberdeenshire Council Early Years Team, with feedback from parents and staff, will work alongside nursery providers to consider adapting nursery session times to better reflect working patterns of local parents.

12. Cluster schools & Head Teachers will continue support for children with ASN needs, ensuring availability of quiet and sensory spaces and smooth transitions.

13. Aberdeenshire Council Economic Development Team, with Community Planning Support, will engage with families on rural employment challenges, especially those impacted by childcare inflexibility.

14. Keig School will identify and support families experiencing rural poverty through trusted relationships, referral to hardship funds, and low-cost initiatives and work with

local action groups to provide community-led sessions on accessing grants, benefits, and services

15. Aberdeenshire Council Planning Services will clarify local housing development pipeline and engage with residents to manage expectations and perceptions.

Civic

Identity and Belonging
Everyone can benefit from a place that has a positive identity, culture and history, where people feel like they belong and are able to participate and interact positively with others.

Evidence and research:

- Community belonging is described as having three elements: community attachment, community identity and social interaction.[15]
- Attachment to place can be associated with good-quality and well-designed public spaces, how welcoming a place is and its aesthetics.[15]
- If people are involved in helping to design and maintain the places they live in, this can build a sense of ownership, belonging and attachment.[15]
- A sense or feeling of belonging to a community is associated positively with mental health, and an improved quality of life.[16]
- Landmarks or something distinctive about the neighbourhood can also help to create a sense of place and belonging, which is beneficial for health.[17]

Feeling Safe
Everyone feels safe and secure in their own home and their local community taking account of the experience of different population groups.

Evidence and research:

- Some groups within the population can have limited access to safe and well-maintained environments.[18]

[15] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes
[16] Literature Review of Quality of Life in the Built Environment
[17] Design for social sustainability – a framework for creating thriving new communities
[18] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

Summary of Discussion

The civic theme explores identity, belonging, and perceptions of feeling safe. The mothballing process, especially the lack of clarity about the nursery's closure, led to feelings of vulnerability and insecurity about the future. However, there were also positive efforts to promote integration across the expanded school catchment and to maintain social cohesion.

A contributor discussed efforts to broaden the sense of community identity at Keig School, which now includes former Tullynessle pupils. They emphasised the importance of making connections with the wider community, including Montgarrie, which is part of the expanded catchment area. Activities such as the potato growing project were mentioned as ways to include the wider community and foster a sense of belonging.

The discussion also touched on the challenges of bringing different rural communities together without overriding their sense of identity. The group noted that the merging of school children from different areas can help create a shared community, but it is important to also include those who do not have children at the school. Encouraging participation in community events and fostering a sense of belonging for all residents is crucial.

Regarding feeling safe, the conversation indicated that the community in Tullynessle generally feels safe, with low crime rates and a strong sense of knowing everyone in the area. However, concerns were raised about the safety of travelling between

Tullynessle and other areas, particularly on the Suie Road during winter. This issue ties back to the broader theme of movement and travel safety.

Feelings of disconnection and exclusion were voiced across the community, particularly around transparency in decision-making. Aberdeenshire Council should continue to review and improve communication around school changes, using clear, inclusive methods. The group agreed that Keig School should continue developing activities that include families across the new catchment area. Tullynessle Hall and local voluntary groups could host regular intergenerational events to rebuild social ties and nurture shared identity, helping to bridge past and present connections across communities.

Recommendations:

16. Aberdeenshire Council Education & Children's Services will continue to identify methods to improve transparency around school decisions, including mothballing and service changes.
17. Keig School should identify methods to increase engagement opportunities for parents who don't regularly attend the school gate, like family events or digital communication use.
18. Tullynessle hall and voluntary groups should host intergenerational and social events to build belonging across former catchments.
19. Aberdeenshire Transport Safety, supported by local policing teams, will support local community safety initiatives, especially around winter road safety and isolated travel routes.

Stewardship

Care and Maintenance
Everyone has access to: • buildings, spaces and routes that are well cared for in a way that is responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities. • good facilities for recycling and well organised refuse storage and collection.

Evidence and research: If people perceive their neighbourhoods as being poorly maintained with high levels of environmental incivilities, they are likely to experience worse health outcomes such as lower levels of mental wellbeing.[19]

Influence and Control
Everyone is empowered to be involved a place in which: • Local outcomes are improved by effective collaborations between communities, community organisations and public bodies. • Decision making processes are designed to involve communities as equal partners. • Community organisations co-produce local solutions to issues. • Communities have increased influence over decisions. • Democratic processes are developed to be accessible to all citizens.

Evidence and research:

- Sense of control can be beneficial for mental health and quality of life. [20]
- People living in more socioeconomically deprived areas can feel less confident about being involved in decision-making compared to less deprived areas.[20]
- Those with a long-term health condition or disability can feel less empowered in decisions about their neighbourhood.[20]

[19] Built Environment and Health
[20] Public Health Scotland, Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

Summary of Discussion:

This theme examines local concerns about the future of the Tullynessle School building during mothballing. The lack of clarity about its long-term future risks loss of viability and community trust. There is also an opportunity to explore community-led asset transfer, should permanent closure proceed.

The group highlighted the perceived lack of clarity around decision-making and the processes involved in the mothballing of Tullynessle School. This lack of clarity can feel more acute in rural areas where there is already a sense of isolation from services and statutory decision-makers. The community reported that they did not realise the nursery would close alongside the school, which added to their feeling of being left out of the decision-making process.

A member of the discussion emphasised the community's concern about the potential deterioration of the Tullynessle School building during the mothballing period. The community fears that the building may become less viable for future use due to lack of maintenance and heating. Another participant confirmed that while the school is mothballed, it must be ready to reopen if needed, which limits the extent to which the building can be repurposed or maintained differently.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of involving the community early in the process of asset transfer if the school were to be permanently closed. A participant raised the point that engaging the community and building their capacity to take over the asset should start early to ensure they are prepared. This involves clear communication about the statutory process and timelines, as well as support from area project officers and community planning officers.

It was explained that the statutory process for closing a school is lengthy, taking up to 18 months to two years, and during this time, the school must remain ready to reopen if necessary. This creates a challenge in balancing the need to keep the building viable for reopening while also addressing the community's desire to repurpose the asset.

The conversation also touched on the need for better communication and awareness-raising about the statutory process and the implications of mothballing. A member of the discussion suggested that sharing information and examples from other communities that have successfully navigated asset transfer could help build capacity and manage expectations in Tullynessle.

The community expressed concern that the mothballed building will deteriorate, potentially becoming unusable for future reopening or alternative community purposes. The group agreed Aberdeenshire Council Property Teams must ensure the building remains viable and maintained during mothballing. Simultaneously, early engagement with local groups about potential asset transfer — supported by the Marr Area Project Officer, Development Trusts Association Scotland, and shared learning from other successful asset transfers or Trusts, such as Logie Coldstone — could empower the community to shape the building's future. In the meantime, creative interim uses of the space could preserve its social value and support wellbeing locally.

Recommendations:

20. Aberdeenshire Council Property Teams and Facility Management will maintain Tullynessle School to ensure it remains viable during mothballing.

21. Marr Area Manager's Team should begin early dialogue with interested community parties about the potential for asset transfer if permanent closure proceeds.

22. Community Council will explore and scope future community use of Tullynessle School building with mentoring from Development Trusts Association Scotland and existing successful local trusts, eg., Logie Coldstone Development trust.

23. Marr Area Project Officer will lead on community capacity-building support, including sharing case studies from successful asset transfers in other areas.

24. Learning Estates Team will assist Keig School in addressing constraints related to the use of Keig Hall facilities and revisiting agreements with hall custodians.

Appendix 3

Participants

- Maxine Booth – Quality Improvement Manager, Aberdeenshire Council
- Rachael Goldring – Learning Estates Team Leader, Aberdeenshire Council
- Anna Zadka-Labus – Learning Estates Officer, Aberdeenshire Council
- Nick Mardall, Marr Area Project Officer, Aberdeenshire Council
- Hilary English, Marr Community Planning Officer, Aberdeenshire Council
- Linda Johnston, Donside Community Council
- Judith Simpson, Education Support Officer, Aberdeenshire Council
- Roderick Campbell, Tullynessle Hall Committee
- Donna Crawford, Head Teacher, Keig Primary School
- Dawn Tuckwood, NHS Public Health Co-ordinator
- Matthew Smart, Community Link Lead, Aberdeenshire Council
- Laura Stewart, Transport Transformation Project Manager, Aberdeenshire Council (Chair)