

Abernyte Primary School Parent Council response to Perth and Kinross Estates Review, November 2017

Executive Summary

The population of the Carse of Gowrie is rising. Because of its restricted catchment area the roll of Abernyte School is falling. A change to the catchment area would secure a future for Abernyte School. This would provide additional capacity for future population growth without additional capital expenditure, increased choice for parents and would retain an important community asset for Abernyte.

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to outline the position of the Abernyte Primary School Parent Council on the Perth and Kinross Estates Review and to set out our proposals to grow the school role and further develop the school.

Our proposal is supported by Inchtute Area Community Council, Abernyte Community Interest Company, Councillor Alasdair Bailey, Councillor Beth Pover, Reverend Doctor Marjorie Mclean, Pete Wishart MP, John Swinney MSP, Jenny Marra MSP, and Sandy Longmuir of The Scottish Rural Schools Network.

Our proposals cover the following two points

1. Efficient use of resources
2. Educational attainment

Efficient Use of Resources

The population of Perth and Kinross is rising, and the Carse of Gowrie is contributing to this rise. Several hundred new houses have been built in Inchtute. In Errol 240 houses are about to be approved for planning at the Airfield (with the opportunity to build many more). New houses have been built in Abernyte. Perthshire has the only completely newly required and built Secondary School in Scotland. The Two primary schools near to Abernyte in Inchtute and Errol have both been extended within the last 5 year, one of them twice suggesting a short term approach to planning school place provision.

Inevitably with the UK's housing supply shortage and the population in Perth and Kinross increasing, further building needs to happen in Perthshire. The

expansion to Abernyte School catchment area will relieve the pressure on Schools south of the A90 and remove the need for additional capital spending.

It is our view that there has been active neglect coupled with poor planning to allow these difficulties to arise for Abernyte School. The school roll has been falling because of demographic changes and a restricted catchment area. We are presenting a plan here to be a part of Perth and Kinross's new review of schools. Abernyte School can be part of a long-term school capacity plan for the Carse of Gowrie.

Our proposal is that the catchments for Abernyte and surrounding areas are reviewed and amended to provide a more even distribution of school pupils. The current catchment boundary has not been changed since the closure of small schools in nearby Rait and Kinnaird at a time when Abernyte School was full. There would need to be a consultation and a transition period. By doing this there could be greater flexibility in the school provision in the Carse, one able to adapt to population increase.

Information provided by the Council, show that there are currently 33 children who attend Inchtute and Longforgan Primary schools from the Abernyte side of the A90. In addition to this, there are 2 Abernyte children who attend Inchtute because there are no boys at Abernyte School. This gives Abernyte a potential school roll of 40 children, which would bring Abernyte back up to 90 percent occupancy (school capacity of 44). In addition to this, a larger school occupancy could enable other potential upsides for the School role e.g. by making pre and post school clubs viable, and by attracting additional children from the south side of the A90 in terms of placement requests. All of this would secure the school roll.

The Commission on Delivery of Rural Education Document on Rural School Financing 2013 sets out that approximately £3000 per pupil supplement is paid by the Scottish Government to Councils to sustain smaller rural schools. If the school roll was increased to 40 pupils this would represent £120,000 additional income for Perth and Kinross Council.

A strategic view from Perth and Kinross Council has not been clear to us in Abernyte and we hope that this estates review will change this. It is an enormous review, with 25% (20/80) of Perthshire schools being considered for closure or similar in two phases. We are in agreement with all schools included in this review that have expressed the view that by just being on the list of schools is deterring new families from considering their school.

A strategic vision needs to include the importance of rural life, not education in isolation. Perth and Kinross Council and the Scottish Government do not have control over the provision of Shops, Post Offices, Public Houses or the Church in villages, but they do have control over Schools. Public buildings are an important part of preventing the centralisation of population and supporting a vibrant rural life. Abernyte Primary School is the hub of this community. With no public building and poor public transport Abernyte risks becoming merely a dormitory community.

Information received from John Swinney MSP (Education Secretary) is that the Scottish Government will not close schools on a financial basis. The grounds for the Estates Review are schools with less than 60% occupancy and school building condition. Both of these are principally financial considerations. Therefore the conduct of this review is flawed. We would expect the appropriate expertise and resource to be provided to the review, aiming at an optimum outcome and not a half-baked one.

Educational Attainment

There is not an educational argument for closure. Academic attainment of past and present pupils is good, as is their wider success in life. Children from Abernyte Primary School do well. Examples of Achievement are past Perth High School Head girl and Deputy Head girl, members of Perth Youth Orchestra, Central Music Groups, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, former pupils placed fifth in Scotland in 2016 Enterprising Maths in Scotland. The Poppy Appeal at Abernyte School is now in its 90th Year.

The purpose of the Curriculum for Excellence is to help young people become:

- Successful learners
- Confident individuals
- Responsible citizens
- Effective contributors

Abernyte is consistently highly rated, offers an excellent standard of education, produces confident individuals, caring members of the community and is a shining example of how rural schooling should be delivered. Music, arts, safeguarding the environment, caring for the community, health & wellbeing, teamwork and charitable activities are all promoted as much as excellence in

academic subjects. Individual pupil requirements are met to ensure all are successful learners. All pupils have the opportunity for personal achievement and independent thinking is encouraged. Abernyte School was the first small school in Perth and Kinross to be awarded green flag status.

That Abernyte School fosters the Curriculum for Excellence capacities was well demonstrated when a long serving and much loved dinner lady retired a few years ago ex-pupils arranged her party with high attendance of past pupils.

When an architect drew up plans for the school lockers and toilet area the pupils realised the new plans did not allow them to hang their coat and change their shoes without getting in one another's way – so they redrew the plans and their proposed changes were implemented.

Finally the history of the community in Abernyte cannot be ignored. There are families in Abernyte where four and five generations have passed through the schools doors. There has been a school here for over 200 years with the current building opened in 1906 and it remains in excellent condition. The success and stability of the community in and around Abernyte should be built upon and not eroded.

Conclusion

We hope this document has clearly described our views on the future of Abernyte Primary School in the context of the Perth and Kinross Estates Review.

It is our view that the school should remain open and catchment boundary changes be adopted to grow the school roll and allow the school to further develop.

It is our view that this will ensure that Perth and Kinross Council are able to make more efficient use of our resources and to continue the high level of educational attainment demonstrated by Abernyte School pupils past and present.