



**EDUCATION**

**OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

**ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021, Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. The Council agreed that in the event that there are no registered pupils by the commencement of session 2022/23 the school be considered for formal closure through the statutory process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=149205>

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2022, the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the required preliminary consultation and an options appraisal, for Achaleven Primary School. The Community Services Committee received a report presenting and outlining details of a potential formal consultation under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* (as amended) and a broad timeline of this process.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/g14780/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2025-Aug-2022%2010.00%20Community%20Services%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

The statutory process for the closure of a rural school is laid out in the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* as amended by the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

The Act, as amended, contains a presumption against closure of a rural school and details specific requirements which the education authority is required to follow if they are formulating a proposal to close a rural school. This includes the introduction of a preliminary consultation process.

In addition, the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015* sets out a new right for community organisations to request the transfer of local assets into local community ownership/management. Public bodies, including councils, must consider such requests and respond to them within a reasonable timescale.

Achaleven Primary School has had zero pupils enrolled since elected members approved the mothballing.

On 25<sup>th</sup> August 2022, the Community Services Committee agreed that the Education Service would undertake the preliminary requirements in relation to considering a rural school closure and look at an options appraisal for Achaleven Primary School. This review will enable the Education Service to identify and consider the options put forward.

The 2010 Act makes special arrangements in regard to rural schools that is in effect a presumption against their closure. There is a requirement to have special regard to the rural schools factors prior to formulating a proposal to close a rural school. In particular, it is necessary to consider any reasonable alternatives before considering closure. It is also necessary to consider the impact on the wider community of a potential closure (and all of the reasonable alternatives) and the impact of any different travel arrangements. These factors have been considered in this options appraisal.

## **2. REASONS FOR THE PROPOSAL**

**2.1** An authority that is contemplating formulating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the 2010 Act before starting to prepare its proposal paper. In particular, it must identify the underlying reasons why the future of the School is being considered, which are as follows:

1. Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021. There were no pupils registered at the school for session 2021/22 and the roll was not predicted to rise in the near future. This continues to be the situation.
2. Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. In January 2023 there were 15.9 fte vacancies for both Head Teachers and Teachers.
3. Whilst the School is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for maintenance.

The Council is therefore considering the future of Achaleven Primary School. The various options are explored within this paper.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

Argyll and Bute is an area of outstanding natural beauty sitting within an ancient landscape with a strong cultural identity. Today, the culture of Argyll and Bute is reflected in its traditional industries of fishing, farming and crofting, sports such as shinty and in its world class musicians and artists as well as its modern commercial industries such as wind turbine production and fish farming.

Argyll and Bute is geographically the second largest authority in Scotland. Education is delivered in a range of settings including schools, partnerships and youth services.

### **3.1 Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan**

The Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan identifies Argyll and Bute as an area of Scotland with outstanding places, people and potential for a prosperous future for everyone. Our Council along with our Community Planning Partners, is committed to ensuring that Argyll and Bute's Economic Success is built on a Growing Population.

This strategic approach embraces the vision for our area, our communities and our people as outlined in the Corporate Plan. Our key service priorities support the delivery of our commitments in the plans, helping to focus on local outcomes that will achieve meaningful improvements for the area, our local communities and our citizens.

Councils have a statutory responsibility in terms of the *Local Government in Scotland Act 2003* to achieve best value. Our Community Services Asset Management Plan provides a review of the property assets used to deliver services. It incorporates the School Estate Management Plan which reflects the local implementation of Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future, the national school estate strategy developed by the Scottish Government in conjunction with local authorities.

The aspirations, guiding principles and objectives contained within Building Better Schools are reflected throughout Education and Children's Services Asset Management Plan (SAMP) for schools and public buildings, both in the management of the existing assets and in the design and construction of developments.

### **3.2 Our Children Their Future**

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980* to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in Our Children, Their Future: Education Vision and Strategy.

### **3.3 Achaleven and the Local Area - the Achaleven Primary School Setting**

Achaleven Primary School is situated in the village of Connel, 5 miles north of Oban. Connel is a small and picturesque village situated on the southern shore of Loch Etive and sits at the end of Connel Bridge, a striking cantilever bridge which spans the sea-mouth of the Loch and was built in 1903 to take the railway line to Fort William. Today it supports the main A828 into Benderloch. Achaleven Primary School sits within grounds between the A85 and Loch Etive.

### **3.4 The School within the Community**

Achaleven Primary School was at one time, active within the community. The pupils invited the community to attend events during the year. However, as the school roll diminished, attendance at events decreased. Whilst being mothballed, the school is not used for any meetings or events, as these tend to be held in Connel Village Hall, a short distance (330 yards) from the school.

### **3.5 Previous Mothballing and Re-Opening**

In April 2011, two papers proposing the amalgamation of Achaleven Primary School with either Dunbeg Primary School or Lochnell Primary School were taken to a special meeting of Argyll and Bute Council. This resulted from the fact that Achaleven Primary School had suffered a decrease of 52 pupils in its roll over the period (2005 – 2011), this was a decline of 83% in the occupancy rate over the same period and the projected roll for 2011/12 was 8 pupils. Following this, Achaleven Primary School was mothballed from June 2011 to August 2012. Achaleven Primary School re-opened with four Primary 1 pupils in August 2012, as a result of the Education Authority determining that the school had become viable again, following a review of the mothballing.

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=257&MID=4611>

### **3.6 Population**

Argyll and Bute has an average population density of just 0.13 persons per hectare. This coupled with the changing demographic profile of the area presents one of our greatest challenges. The table below refers directly to the Achaleven area showing the changing population from census 2001 to census 2011:

Table 1: Population Information

Achaleven Area Census			
2001		2011	
Total Resident Population	135	Total Resident Population	129
% under 16	17.77	% under 16	21.7
% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	54.81	% 16 – 64 (pensionable age)	62.0
% pensionable age and over	27.41	% pensionable age and over	16.2

It is recognised that the census area and the catchment area of Achaleven Primary School differ slightly.

### 3.7 Development and House Building

The current Local Development Plan (LDP2) was adopted in 2019. This sets out planning and development proposals for the next 10 years from 2020 and a vision for 20 years. The Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan provides the local planning framework for the Council area, excluding the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park area. The Plan is divided into the written statement and proposals maps. The written statement provides the general policy context against which planning applications for new development proposals should be assessed. This is supported by the proposals maps which show the range of development opportunities and constraints within the area, for example:

- the key development areas i.e. the allocations for housing, industry and business, community facilities and infrastructure;
- the potential areas for future development (Potential Development Areas);
- areas requiring actions such as environmental improvement or regeneration (Areas for Action); and
- environmental designations such as national Scenic Areas, Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas and Local Nature Conservation Sites.

*Appendix 1* shows the LDP for Achaleven/Connel.

*Appendix 2* provides the key for Local Development Plans.

### 3.8 Achaleven Primary School

Achaleven Primary School, in Connel, is a non-denominational school situated on the main A85 Glasgow to Oban road, by the Connel Bridge. The school serves the village of Connel and its surrounding area from Achnacloich in the east to Dunstaffnage House in the west. The main accommodation, which is over 100 years old, contains two classrooms, toilets, staffroom, office, two resource storage areas, and display areas. There is a detached annexe, which is used as a third classroom and a dining room where School meals are served. Pupils have access to either a grass or a tarmac play area.

*Appendix 3* shows the Achaleven Primary School Floor Plan.

Achaleven Primary School is 2.8 miles from Dunbeg Primary School and 3.6 miles from Lochnell Primary School.

The Scottish Government's Rural School List (October 2021) classifies Achaleven Primary School as 'very remote rural'. This is defined as an area with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more. Achaleven Primary is one of 21 primary schools associated with Oban High School.

### **3.9 Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools**

Following the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School, parents/carers have the choice to send their children to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools.

*Appendix 3 shows the Achaleven Primary Floor Plan*

*Appendix 4 shows the Lochnell Primary and ELC Floor Plan*

*Appendix 5 shows the Dunbeg Primary and ELC Floor Plan*

Lochnell Primary School is a non-denominational and co-educational school situated in the village of Benderloch on the main Oban to Fort William road. The building is single storey and was opened in 1992. The teaching bays in the original building are semi open plan. The new extension teaching bays are open plan. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the primary school. Lochnell Primary School has capacity for 147 pupils.

A joint school and community project was completed to provide and maintain an all-weather pitch adjacent to the school. The pitch is used very well by the school every day. The community have access to the pitch out-with school times and the public can book it at the local garage.

The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs. The school has very good links with Oban High School as their associated secondary school. Lochnell Primary has a Pre5 Unit within the school for 3 and 4 year olds.

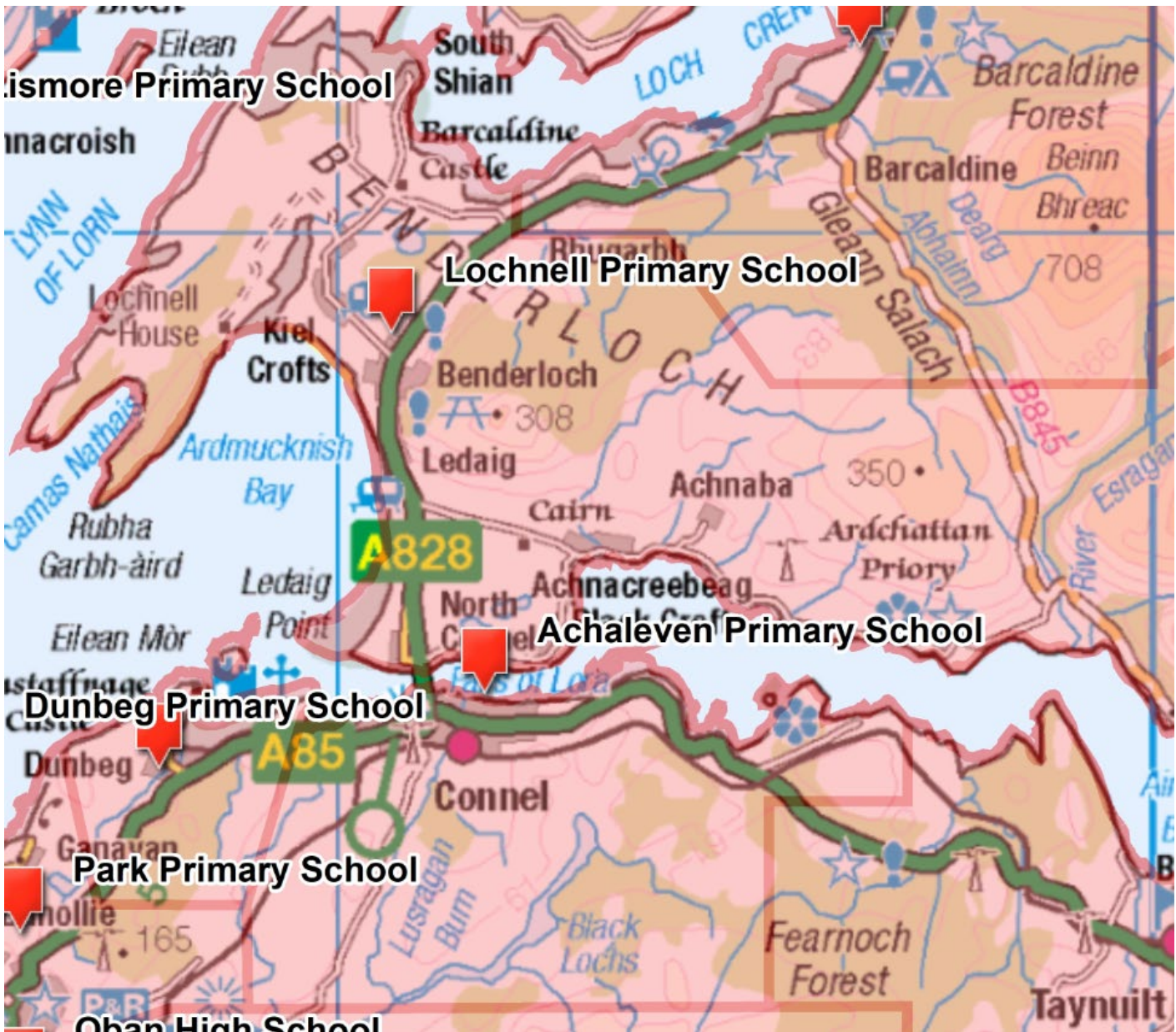
Dunbeg Primary School is a non-denominational and co-educational school situated in the village of Dunbeg approximately three miles from the town of Oban. It is a single storey building originally opened in 1960 and has an extension to facilitate community activities. Recent additions include toilet/shower facilities for children with additional needs. Facing west are five classrooms and hall with large windows that provide a bright and pleasant working atmosphere. In front is a split-level play area with garden and netball court.

To one side is a games field and to the other a well-equipped play park for younger children. With capacity for 174 children of all denominations from P1-7, it also provides preschool education with spaces for 20 3–5 year olds. The school has very good links with Oban High School as their associated secondary school.

The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2021 classifies Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools as 'very remote rural'. Oban High School is the associated Secondary School for all three primary schools.

The Map below shows the adjoining catchment areas of Achaleven and Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools Catchment Areas:





**3.10 Pupil Numbers**

Pupil projections, and data for 2023-24 are based on the 2022 pupil census, a return prepared annually for the Scottish Government. Past pupil numbers are historic data from past pupil censuses. Pupil projections for future P1 intakes are currently based on the 3 year average intake figure. Historical data shows that from 2014-2020, an average of 5 placing requests were made to schools out-with the Achaleven Primary School catchment area. This had a significant impact on the roll of Achaleven Primary School. There are currently 36 primary aged children residing in the Achaleven Primary School catchment. 20 of these children currently attend Lochnell Primary School and 16 currently attend Dunbeg Primary School.

Table 2 shows the historic and current pupil numbers for both Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary schools:

<b>Table 2:</b>	<b>Achaleven PS</b>	<b>Dunbeg PS</b>	<b>Lochnell PS</b>
<b>Capacity</b>	41	174	147
	Roll	Roll	Roll
<b>2008-09</b>	39	80	92
<b>2009-2010</b>	27	81	87
<b>2010-2011</b>	8	79	92
<b>2011-2012</b>	0	76	96
<b>2012-2013</b>	4	73	101
<b>2013-2014</b>	5	76	112
<b>2014-2015</b>	9	81	109
<b>2015-2016</b>	10	82	114
<b>2016-2017</b>	12	78	124
<b>2017-2018</b>	9	99	130
<b>2018-19</b>	13	88	124
<b>2019-20</b>	9	98	114
<b>2020-21</b>	7	90	112
<b>2021-22</b>	0	88	119
<b>2022-23</b>	0	89	118

Table 3 shows projected rolls for Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools according to figures held by Argyll and Bute Council:

<b>Table 3:</b>	<b>Achaleven PS</b>	<b>Dunbeg PS</b>	<b>Lochnell PS</b>
<b>Capacity</b>	41	174	147
<b>2023 -2024</b>	1	125	116
<b>2024 -2025</b>	0	128	114
<b>2025-2026</b>	0	130	122

\* A prediction based on information available date

#### **4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 Meetings**

A Community Engagement Meeting was held in Achaleven Primary School, on December 1st, 2022 from 13:00-19:00 hours. This was to seek the views of the community on the future of Achaleven School. This meeting was attended by 5 people from 3 households. There are currently no primary aged children in Lochnell Primary who previously attended Achaleven Primary School, and there are currently 2 primary aged children in Dunbeg Primary who previously attended Achaleven Primary School.

##### **4.2 Content of Meetings**



Attendees at the meetings were given an overview of the information that the Council would be using in this Options Appraisal, this included pupil projections, financial information, development information and local services and facilities.

The questions were as follows:

*Over the last year and a half, what has been the effect of mothballing Achaleven School on you, your family and community?*

*In your view what are the pros/cons of the following options:*

- *Continue with mothballing*
- *Re- open the school*
- *Close the school*

Attendees also noted questions regarding the future of the school, and points of information that should be considered in the Options Appraisal.

### **4.3 Feedback**

There was a range of viewpoints on the future of Achaleven School:

- **Community and Parents**

The majority of the community were in agreement that the low numbers of children did not make the re-opening of the school realistic. There was a small percentage of people in support of continued mothballing in order to retain the building in case of future need. The majority of the community felt that it would be disappointing if the building lay empty and became derelict and were keen to explore other options for the building should the school close permanently. Parents of children with very young children expressed concern that the school may be closed but agreed this may be the best option when projected numbers were clarified.

- **Staff**

Staff members acknowledged that without a significant number of pupils, re-opening the school is not viable.

#### **General Comments:**

*'I don't think I would send my children to Achaleven if there were only a few other children in the school.'*

*'I already send my children to Lochnell as there is also Pre 5 provision there and transport is easy'*

*'Continued mothballing would mean further deterioration to the building and it may end up beyond repair which would be a shame'*

*'Mothballing could be beneficial if there are a viable number of children due to start at Achaleven in the next few years but it wouldn't be good for the children if there were going to be very low numbers in classes and across the school'*

*'Is there enough capacity at other local schools to accommodate pupils from Achaleven in the future?'*

*'It would be beneficial to have a safe cycle route to Dunbeg'*

*'If projected numbers are very low or non-existent then it makes more sense to close'*

### **Pupil comments**

*'I was worried and optimistic. The old school was small. We are a lot happier at Dunbeg than we were at Achaleven.'*

*'I was worried about moving from a small to a really big school. I was not used to it. I was pretty ok afterwards. If I had to go back to a small school I'd feel pretty confused and I'd not be used to it.'*

## **5.0 THE PROPOSAL AND REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSAL AS CONSIDERED BY THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021. The school roll was very low and there were no pupils projected to attend in August 2021 or August 2022. The roll is not predicted to rise above 1 pupil in the near future. There is very little community support for the reopening of the school.

Whilst the building is mothballed it continues to deteriorate. The community is keen to ensure a future for the building if possible. Along with several other rural councils, Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. In January 2023 there were 15.9 fte vacancies for both Head Teachers and Teachers.

The Council is required to consider the future of Achaleven Primary School. The following options are explored within this paper:

- a) Re-open Achaleven Primary School.
- b) Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary with the pupils zoned to either Lochnell or Dunbeg Primary Schools.
- c) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Dunbeg Primary School
- d) Close Achaleven Primary School and realign its catchment area to Lochnell Primary School.

## **6. OPTION A: RE-OPEN ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **6.1 Community Feedback**

Of the 5 community members that attended the Options Appraisal engagement event, no one was in support of re-opening the School because the lack of feasibility due to low pupil numbers.

## Pupil comment

*‘Over all closing it was a healthy decision. It was really small and you couldn’t really make friends.’*

## 6.2 Pupil Numbers

If the school were to reopen in August 2023, the maximum Primary 1 intake in terms of catchment pupils would be one. It has been stated that without a viable number of pupils for the School, parents would not be considering placing their children to attend Achaleven Primary School if it were to re-open. In the six years from 2014-2020 (before the school was mothballed in August 2021), an average of 5 placing requests were made to schools out-with the catchment each year. Currently, there are 36 primary school aged children residing within the catchment area for Achaleven Primary School. 20 of these pupils attend Lochnell Primary School and 16 attend Dunbeg Primary School.

If the school were to re-open, sustainability may not be viable due to the fact that pupil numbers over the next four years are not predicted to rise and are well below the capacity of the school building.

Table 4: Pupil Numbers

Achaleven Primary	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Approved Capacity	41	41	41	41
Roll Projection	1	0	0	0

## 6.3 Financial Information

The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£140, 660<sup>1</sup>**

The annual cost of mothballing Achaleven Primary School is **£5,400**.

The cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£25,465**.

## 6.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being considered are as stated at Section 2 of this report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School to increase. Achaleven Primary School is currently mothballed and there were no

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<sup>1</sup> Annual costs for running a comparative school for Achaleven Primary School.

pupils enrolled to start Primary 1 in either August 2021 or August 2022. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

#### 6.4.1 Community Impact

The reopening of the school would enable the premises to be used by the community. It would also be a possibility that the school pupils would invite the community to specific events, as they did in the past. The presence of a school and the facilities/activities that may be offered could make the area a more attractive place to live although it is recognised that two other primary schools are nearby. Reopening the school may therefore encourage families with school age children to move to the community. This in turn may make the community more sustainable.

However, the community have demonstrated no wish for the school to reopen. Almost all who attended the community engagement event indicated that it would be worthwhile to explore the repurposing of the school building to become a facility for the community to use rather than an educational establishment.

Respondents noted the negative impact of the school mothballing on the community as:

- The visual impact on the community of the mothballed school.
- The continued deterioration of the building.

If the school were to reopen as an educational establishment there would be an economic impact with respect to the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard. There would also be costs relating to staffing, and ongoing maintenance. Maintenance and building costs would also have to be met by the community if the school were to reopen as a community hub. The reopening of the school and the potential relocation of families may have a positive effect on the wider economy of the community.

#### 6.4.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes by car/bus. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes by car/bus. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. If Achaleven Primary School was to reopen there could be a positive impact on the health and wellbeing and education of pupils who are able to walk or cycle to school. Staff would either travel to the school by car, or if they live locally could walk or cycle. There may be a positive environmental impact as the use of vehicles to transport pupils may decrease. Conversely, there could be increased car usage by staff which may mean these travel arrangements have a negative environmental impact. The respective positive and negative impact may therefore balance.

### 6.5 Educational Benefits

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

With respect to outdoor learning, community spaces could be used either in the school grounds or in the immediate neighbourhood if the school were to reopen. Outdoor learning is provided by all schools.

There would be issues with respect to the current condition and suitability of the school buildings and facilities which would negatively impact learning and teaching.

## 6.6 Summary

5 people attended the consultation and the majority were not in favour of reopening Achaleven Primary as a school. If the school reopened, projected P1 pupil numbers for August 2023 would be one, and this is predicted to decrease over the next three years. There are currently 36 children residing in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area, 20 of these pupils attend Lochnell Primary School and 16 attend Dunbeg Primary School. An average of 5 placing requests to schools out-with the Achaleven catchment area have been made each academic session from 2014 until the school was mothballed in 2021. This has had a significant impact on the school roll and the Primary 1 intake.

There are financial implications if the school is to be reopened. The total amount including employee; premises; supplies and services and catering consideration to re-open the school is **£140,660<sup>2</sup>**, with the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school is **£25, 465**.

If the School was to be reopened, the premises would be able to be used by the community out-with school hours as a hub, in addition to its use as an educational facility. However, Connel Village Hall is a short distance from the school and is currently used for community events. The reopening of the School may encourage families with school age children to move to the community, which may make the community more sustainable.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes by car/bus. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes by car/bus. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. If Achaleven Primary School was to reopen there could be a positive impact on the health and wellbeing and education of pupils who are able to walk or cycle to school. Staff would either travel to the school by car, or if they live locally could walk or cycle. There may be a positive environmental impact as the use

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<sup>2</sup> Annual costs for running a comparative school for Achaleven.

of vehicles to transport pupils may decrease. Conversely, there could be increased car usage by staff which may mean these travel arrangements have a negative environmental impact. The respective positive and negative impact may therefore balance.

There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

When considering the above alongside projected low pupil numbers, the challenges in recruiting teaching staff, the considerable expenditure needed to bring the building up to standard and the lack of local support for reopening Achaleven Primary School this is not considered to be a reasonable option.

## **7. OPTION B: CONTINUED MOTHBALLING OF ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH PUPILS ZONED TO LOCHNELL AND DUNBEG PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

The Statutory Guidance for the 2010 Act, in relation to mothballing, states *“the maximum length of its duration is likely to depend on the location of the school and the desirability of maintaining capacity to re-open a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed 3 years in areas that are not very remote.”* Achaleven Primary School has been mothballed since August 2021.

### **7.1 Community Feedback**

There are some ideas for the future of the building which may be taken forward by the community as a hub for community life, although it was noted that Connel Village Hall is only 330 yards from the school. There was a significant view at the community meeting that mothballing the school over a long period is wasteful due to deterioration of the property and should not be prolonged:

*‘We are concerned that the building falls into disrepair and becomes derelict or an eyesore’*

*‘It would be good to discuss potential future use of the building at a Community Council Meeting’*

*‘It would be good if the building could house a nursery provision but understand that low numbers may mean that this is not viable’*

### **7.2 Pupil Numbers**

Pupil numbers are not projected to increase over the next 4 years, as per Table 4 above.

### **7.3 Financial Information**

The current annual cost 2022/23 to the Council of the mothballed Achaleven Primary School is **£5,400**. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs. Neither does it take account



of the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school which is **£25,465**. Pupils living in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area are currently transported to Lochnell Primary and Dunbeg Primary through parental choice. A Council minibus transports the pupils to Dunbeg Primary at a cost of approximately **£19,009** per annum and a West Coast Motors service bus transports the pupils to Lochnell Primary. Due to the fact that the West Coast Motors service operates on an existing route and is part of a larger contract, there is no additional cost to transport pupils from Achaleven to Lochnell Primary School.

#### **7.4 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being considered are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation that the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School will increase. Achaleven Primary School is currently mothballed and although there are currently no registered pupils, pupils would be rezoned to another local school. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

##### **7.4.1 Community Impact**

If pupils are to continue their education in Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools there would be no change to the current impact on the community. If the mothballing of Achaleven was to continue the building would deteriorate further and eventually become unavailable. This could have a detrimental effect on the sustainability of the Achaleven community. At present the school grounds are available for community use. The small number of community residents who attended the meeting view the buildings and grounds as a potential opportunity to develop a community hub and there were some suggestions for possible usage. This may make the area a more attractive place to live, and in turn, may positively impact community sustainability.

##### **7.4.2 Travel Arrangements**

There is no change to the travel arrangements that are currently in place nor to the environmental impact from these. The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828 and travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. Continued mothballing of Achaleven Primary School would have no effect on current staff travel. The small number of children has minimal effect on staffing within the receiving primary schools. Pupils living in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area are currently transported to Lochnell Primary and Dunbeg Primary through parental choice. Currently, a Council minibus transports the pupils to Dunbeg Primary and a West Coast Motors service bus transports the pupils to Lochnell Primary.

#### **7.5 Educational Benefits**

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits from reopening the school as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Achaleven, Dunbeg and Lochnell are remote rural schools. Each school is set within a very remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Achaleven area, attending Lochnell and Dunbeg Primary Schools are benefitting from the broader rural environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. High quality outdoor learning is currently provided at both primary schools.

The co-location of the nursery and the primary classes at Dunbeg and Lochnell Primaries enhances the transition process for the children moving from Nursery into Primary one, through joint educational processes and liaison between the settings. Transition to secondary school is enhanced through joint planning and educational experiences.

## **7.6 Summary**

The majority of people who attended the consultation were not in favour of continuing the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School if projected pupil numbers were not expected to rise. There was a view at the community meetings that mothballing the school over a long period was wasteful due to deterioration of the property and potentially affected sustainability of the community. Pupil numbers are not predicted to rise in terms of pre-school children living within the catchment area. Mothballing had no positive impact on the reasons for the proposal.

The current annual cost (2022/23) to the Council of the mothballed Achaleven Primary School is **£5,400**. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs. Neither does it take account of the cost to bring the property to an acceptable standard to re-open the school which is **£25,465**. There is no current annual transport cost for taking pupils to an alternative school.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes. The travel distance from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828 and travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Adverse weather can be a factor, however this is the same for other local schools and areas. Pupils living in the Achaleven Primary School catchment area are currently transported to Lochnell Primary and Dunbeg Primary through parental choice. A Council minibus transports the pupils to Dunbeg Primary and a West Coast Motors service bus transports the pupils to Lochnell Primary. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Should the school continue to be mothballed these travel arrangements would continue.

There are no specific educational benefits from continuing the mothballing of Achaleven Primary school.

On the basis that pupil numbers are not expected to increase significantly and the building's mothballing is not of benefit to the community or the Council, continued mothballing of Achaleven Primary School is not viewed as a reasonable option.

## 8. OPTION C: CLOSE ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR DUNBEG PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT ACHALEVEN CATCHMENT AREA

### 8.1 Community Feedback

The majority of people who attended the Options Appraisal meeting were not in favour of reopening Achaleven Primary as a school given the very low/ no projected pupil numbers. They commented that there were not enough children to support re-opening the School. Additionally, with respect to very low/ non-existent numbers in future school roll projections, the sustainability of the School did not support re-opening of the School. Comments in relation to the closure of Achaleven Primary School and attendance at Dunbeg Primary School were generally positive:

*'It would be beneficial if there was a safe walk or cycling route to Dunbeg'*

*'I would prefer that my child was able to walk or cycle to school but appreciate that in a more rural setting, this isn't always possible'*

#### Pupil comments

*'I wouldn't mind it (Achaleven) staying open but I would be upset to have to go back. I'd like to stay here. I like a big school.'*

### 8.2 Pupil Numbers

Table 5: Schools Occupancy:

Primary	2023/2024	2024/25
Dunbeg Approved Capacity	174	174
Dunbeg Projected Roll	125	128
Achaleven Projected Roll	1	0
Total Roll Projection	126	128
Occupancy	72.4%	73.5%

Pupils from Achaleven Primary catchment area would attend Dunbeg Primary School, as there are currently no pupils attending Achaleven there is no significant projected addition to school roll at Dunbeg Primary School. The current occupancy rate for Dunbeg Primary School is 51%. There is a projected roll of one pupil for Achaleven Primary for August 2023. This coupled with an increase in projected pupil numbers within the catchment area will take the roll for Dunbeg Primary from 89 in session 2022/23 to 126 in session 2023/24. The significant increase forecast is due to new house building taking place in the area. The projected school roll for Dunbeg Primary School is expected to increase incrementally over the next 9 years. By 2030, Dunbeg Primary School is expected to have an occupancy rate of 90%.

### **8.3 Financial Information**

If the existing council minibus was to be used, this would cost approximately **£19,009** per annum. If Achaleven Primary School were to be closed it would generate savings of **£5,400** - the current annual cost of mothballing (2022/23) to the Council. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs.

### **8.4 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being reviewed are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School to increase. Achaleven Primary School is currently mothballed and were there pupils they would be rezoned to other schools. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

#### **8.4.1 Community Impact**

The community supported the proposed closure of the school with the building and adjoining grounds being retained for community use where viable. All people who attended the consultation stated that they would be in favour of preliminary work to investigate whether the school building could be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the visual impact of the village. While it is accepted that school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, a community hub could be an asset to a community. However, as previously stated, Connel Village Hall is situated 330 yards from Achaleven Primary School and is used for village events. If the Community wished to create a community hub, they would require to find a mechanism to acquire the property from the Council and deliver that aspiration. The buildings forming the school premises are situated within walking distance of the village. If the local plans for the building progress, this may have a positive impact on the sustainability of the village. Formal closure of the school would mean that these plans could potentially be progressed by the community.

#### **8.4.2 Travel Arrangements**

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85. Travel time is approximately 6

minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. This option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School, in terms of travel would have a neutral effect on the environment. There is currently an annual transport cost of approximately **£19,009** per annum for pupils to travel to Dunbeg Primary School on a council mini bus. Going forward, this cost would continue to be incurred annually.

### **8.5 Educational Benefits**

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Both Dunbeg and Achaleven are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Achaleven area who would attend Dunbeg Primary School are benefitting from the broader rural environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. High quality outdoor learning is currently provided at Dunbeg Primary. The pupils would then be transitioning to Oban High School with an established friendship group.

In Dunbeg Primary School children are taught in classes composed of children from more than one year group. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social group. They are able to interact and socialise with groups of children of their own gender, take part in team activities and move with their peers to secondary school.

### **8.6 Summary**

The majority of people who attended the Community Engagement event were in favour of closing Achaleven Primary as a school. They also commented on the potential for the school premises to be used as a community asset.

The current capacity for Dunbeg Primary School is 51%, however, due to house building within the catchment, there is expected to be a significant increase in the school roll and therefore a significant increase in the occupancy rate of the school. This is projected to be 72.4% by August 2023 and 90% by August 2030. The additional annual cost to transport pupils to Dunbeg Primary school on a council mini bus is approximately £19,009 per annum. Going forward, this cost would continue to be incurred annually.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Dunbeg Primary is 2.8 miles via the A85 and this option would have no effect on the current

travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School would therefore have a neutral effect on the environment. Dunbeg Primary currently accommodates pupils from Achaleven School and pupil numbers travelling from the current Achaleven catchment area are not projected to increase significantly. However, Dunbeg Primary has limited capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers due to the projected increase in the roll through an increase in pupils residing within the catchment area.

On the basis, as detailed previously, that the school roll at Dunbeg Primary is projected to increase significantly and therefore the school capacity rate will also increase annually for the foreseeable future, the closure of Achaleven Primary School and realignment of the Dunbeg Primary School catchment area to include the current Achaleven Primary School catchment is not viewed as a reasonable option.

**9. OPTION D: CLOSE ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR LOCHNELL PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL CATCHMENT AREA**

**9.1 Community Feedback**

The majority of people who attended the Options Appraisal meeting were not in favour of reopening Achaleven Primary as a school given the very low/no projected pupil numbers. They commented that there were not enough children to support re-opening the School. Additionally, with respect to very low/ non-existent numbers in future school roll projections, the sustainability of the School did not support re-opening of the School. Comments in relation to the closure of Achaleven Primary School and attendance at Lochnell Primary School were generally positive:

*‘I already send my children to Lochnell Primary School and transport is easy’*

*‘I would prefer that my child was able to walk or cycle to school but appreciate that in a more rural setting, this isn’t always possible’*

Community members commented on the school premises and potential for this to become a community asset:

*‘The building to be used for a purpose to benefit the community for example a community hub with a nursery and café.’*

Community members discussed potentially pursuing options for use of the building as a community hub.

**9.2 Pupil Numbers**

Table 5: Schools Occupancy:

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2023/2024</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>Lochnell</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Approved Capacity</i>		



<i>Primary</i>	<i>2023/2024</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>Lochnell Projected Roll</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Achaleven Projected Roll</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Occupancy</i>	<i>79.6%</i>	<i>77.6%</i>

Pupils from Achaleven Primary catchment area would attend Lochnell Primary School. As there are currently no pupils attending Achaleven there is no projected addition to school roll at Lochnell Primary School. The current occupancy rate for Lochnell Primary School is 80%. There is a projected roll of one pupil for Achaleven Primary for August 2023, this would take the projected roll for Lochnell Primary to 117.

### **9.3 Financial Information**

An existing West Coast bus means that there would be no additional annual transport costs. If Achaleven Primary School were to be closed it would generate savings of **£5,400** - the current annual cost of mothballing (2022/23) to the Council. This includes electricity, heating oil, and ground maintenance but does not include building maintenance and repair costs.

### **9.4 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being reviewed are as stated at Section 2 of this Report. There is no expectation for the pupil numbers at Achaleven Primary School to increase. Achaleven Primary School is currently mothballed and were there pupils they would be rezoned to other schools. To reopen the school would not increase the pupil numbers.

#### **9.4.1 Community Impact**

The community supported the proposed closure of the school with the building and adjoining grounds being retained for community use where viable. All people who attended the consultation stated that they would be in favour of preliminary work to investigate whether the school building could be retained for community use and not allowed to fall into further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the visual impact of the village. While it is accepted that school closure may have an adverse effect on a community, a community hub could be an asset to a community. However, as previously stated, Connel Village Hall is situated 330 yards from Achaleven Primary School and is used for village events. If the Community wished to create a community hub, they would require to find a mechanism to acquire the property from the Council and deliver that aspiration. The buildings forming the school premises are situated within walking distance of the village. If the local plans for the building progress, this may have a positive impact on the sustainability of the village. Formal

closure of the school would mean that these plans could potentially be progressed by the community.

#### 9.4.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and the A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. This option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School, in terms of travel would have a neutral effect on the environment. There is currently no annual transport cost for pupils to travel to Lochnell Primary School as it is part of an existing West Coast Motors service bus and therefore would not incur additional costs in the immediate future.

### 9.5 **Educational Benefits**

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. There are no specific educational benefits as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of children.

Both Lochnell and Achaleven are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Achaleven area who would attend Lochnell Primary School are benefitting from the broader rural environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment. High quality outdoor learning is currently provided at Lochnell Primary. The pupils would then be transitioning to Oban High School with an established friendship group.

In Lochnell Primary School children are taught in classes composed of children from more than one year group. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social group. They are able to interact and socialise with groups of children of their own gender, take part in team activities and move with their peers to secondary school.

### 9.6 **Summary**

The majority of people who attended the Community Engagement event were in favour of closing Achaleven Primary as a school. They also commented on the potential for the school premises to be used as a community asset.

Current capacity for Lochnell Primary School is 80%, with no significant increase to the school roll predicted in forthcoming years. There is no additional annual cost to transport pupils to Lochnell Primary school as this is part of an existing route and wider

contract with West Coast Motors and use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would not incur additional costs.

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and the A828 and this option would have no effect on the current travel arrangements of staff and pupils. The closure of Achaleven Primary School would therefore have a neutral effect on the environment. Lochnell Primary currently accommodates pupils from Achaleven Primary School's catchment area, and pupil numbers are not projected to increase significantly. Lochnell Primary has capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers.

In Lochnell Primary School, children benefit from a very positive learning environment with learning and teaching which is well matched to the needs of the young people who attend the school. In addition there is a clear focus on nurturing the health and wellbeing of pupils.

This has been identified as a reasonable option for further consideration.

## 9. OVERVIEW OF OPTIONS

Option	Option Description	Outcome
A	Re-open Achaleven Primary School with the existing catchment area	Not a reasonable option.
B	Continued Mothballing of Achaleven Primary School with the pupils zoned to Dunbeg and Lochnell Primary Schools	Not a reasonable option.
C	Close Achaleven Primary School and realign the catchment area of Dunbeg Primary School to include the current catchment area for Achaleven Primary School.	Not a reasonable option.
D	Close Achaleven Primary School and realign the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area for Achaleven Primary School.	A reasonable option with some representation that the school becomes a facility the community can develop if viable.

## 10. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF REASONABLE OPTION: CLOSE ACHALEVEN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REALIGN THE CATCHMENT AREA FOR LOCHNELL PRIMARY SCHOOL TO INCLUDE THE CURRENT ACHALEVEN CATCHMENT AREA

### 10.1 Pupil Projections

<i>Primary</i>	<i>2023/2024</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>Lochnell Approved Capacity</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Lochnell Projected Roll</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Achaleven Projected Roll</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Total Roll Projection</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Occupancy</i>	<i>79.6%</i>	<i>77.6%</i>

## **10.2 Educational Benefits**

This statement focusses on Lochnell Primary School which is one of the schools that parents/carers within the Achaleven Catchment can currently choose to send their child to, and the school which would subsume Achaleven's current catchment area as part of Option D.

### **10.2.1 Learning and Teaching**

The curriculum includes a broad range of experiences which are planned for children and young people through their education, to help every child and young person to develop knowledge, skills and attributes for success in learning, life and work.

The school are committed to providing appropriate opportunities for the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural values through both the ethos and the curriculum. This is undertaken in partnership with parents/carers and takes account of the individual needs of pupils and the views of parents/carers.

The aim of Lochnell Primary School and Early Years is to ensure each child feels safe and happy so that they may achieve their potential. To do this, the school follow the principles of being Ready, Respectful and Safe (RRS). These principles sit alongside their core values which were reviewed and refreshed in January 2020. The core school values are: Kind, ambitious, fun, inclusive and curious.

The aims of Lochnell Primary are to:

- Inspire curiosity and creativity through rich learning experiences.
- Encourage ambition by opening minds, aiming high and celebrating achievements.
- Develop kindness through an ethos of inclusion and mutual respect.

- Enable appreciation and consideration of our local community and the wider world.
- Create a calm, purposeful and fun learning environment where learners feel valued.
- Continue to evaluate, evolve and excel!

Children know that their views are sought, valued and acted upon. The learning environment encourages high level of achievement, providing a wide range of opportunities for children to achieve their full potential within the four contexts of learning.

In Lochnell Primary School children may be taught in classes composed of children from more than one year group. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships with different groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a social group. They are able to interact and socialise with groups of children of varying sizes and composition, take part in team activities and move with their peers to secondary school.

There is a continual challenge for all schools to deliver a school improvement agenda and deliver effectively the principles and outcomes of curriculum for excellence. The National Improvement Framework priorities include raising attainment for all, and closing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children.

The principles of Curriculum for Excellence recognise the professionalism of teachers and the importance of this in exercising the freedom and responsibility associated with broader guidance. This means that schools are able to design their curriculum to meet the specific needs of their children and community. The general aim of the school is to provide an atmosphere of mutual respect and collective responsibility. Pupils, parents/carers and staff all have an important part to play in producing and sustaining this positive ethos.

Lochnell Primary School welcomes and encourages diversity and individuality, while emphasizing their common commitment to moral values such as honesty, respect for others, compassion and justice. Fundamental principles of the school are that all who are involved in the life of the school have the right to be respected as individuals and carry the responsibility to act in a considerate and respectful manner towards others. The school are firmly committed to the elimination of any form of discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, gender or disability.

Lochnell has a working partnership with the village church and enjoy visits to church (virtual or in person) to celebrate special events throughout the year. The pupils also enjoy visits to the school and early

years setting by the local minister. They welcome connections to other faiths and have linked with members of different faiths to provide a context for their curriculum and enhance understanding. Lochnell School, its resources and activities provide a focal point for the community. The involvement of parents/carers and other members of the community in school activities is highly valued and increases the range of experiences on offer for learners.

Parents are kept informed of school activities and the school are currently reviewing how best to do this. Parents/carers are always welcome to call at the school for further information and/or to arrange to see the Head Teacher.

Having an early years setting alongside the school has improved transition and liaison. However, the school are careful to maintain links with the other pre-5 groups in the area to ensure a smooth transition process into P1 for all.

Links with other Oban and Lorn Primary schools are strong and when possible, the pupils enjoy activities throughout the year to share their learning and skills. Active Schools provide many opportunities for the pupils and there is an ongoing programme to train Young Leaders, ensuring additional leadership opportunities within the school.

Lochnell School has very strong links with Oban High and this makes the transition from P7 to S1 smooth and productive, ensuring that all pupils are well support as they move to High School.

Both Lochnell and Achaleven are very remote rural schools. Each school is set within a remote rural area (Scottish Government classification). Children from Achaleven area, who would attend Lochnell Primary School would benefit from the broader rural environment, whilst not moving their learning to a school that is completely different to their home environment.

#### 10.2.2

##### Outcomes

Through the GIRFEC practice model, meeting the needs of every child continues to be a priority and teachers carefully plan and assess to ensure each child has the opportunity to reach their potential. Careful tracking and monitoring procedures are in place to evidence pupil progress. This includes professional dialogue with teachers, learning discussions with children, classroom observations, assessment and looking at pupil work. Planning for Progress meetings are being further strengthened. These discussions between home and school improve parental engagement whilst focussing on next steps for learning. Where



appropriate, intervention is put in place, while working effectively with other agencies and parents to ensure the needs of each child are met.

In the primary classes, standards of attainment have been maintained over the last three years. Most children are achieving national expectations in reading, writing, listening, talking and numeracy.

#### 10.2.3 Experiences - Broadening the Range of Opportunities

Children are offered a range of active, planned experiences which help them develop the knowledge and understanding, skills, capabilities and attributes which they need for their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing both now and in the future. Throughout the school session there are opportunities for the children to take part in wider – curricular activities and after school clubs.

The variety, frequency and nature of the clubs depends on the availability of staff and senior pupils and parents to run and supervise them. More information is available from the school office.

Educational visits are an important part of the learning process and it is crucial to use our environment as a learning resource. The number and scope of these visits is governed by our financial situation and the opportunities available. Parents and carers help us supervise these outings and we are grateful for the enthusiastic help. Groups from the school compete in local festivals and competitions

#### 10.2.4 Environment for Learning

Lochnell Primary School is situated in the village of Benderloch on the main Oban to Fort William road. The building is single storey and was opened in 1992. The teaching bays in the original building are semi open plan. The new extension teaching bays are open plan. The entire building is well maintained and along with the surrounding scenery provides attractive accommodation for the primary school.

A joint school and community project was completed to provide and maintain an all weather pitch adjacent to the school. The pitch is used very well by the school every day. The community have access to the pitch out with school times and the public can book it at the local garage.

The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs. They enjoy good links with Oban High School as the associated secondary school. Lochnell Primary has a Pre5 Unit within the school for 3 and 4 year olds.

### **10.3 Assessment of Rural Factors**

The reasons why the future of Achaleven Primary School is being reviewed are stated at Section 2 of this report. There is currently no expectation for the pupil numbers to increase at the School. Achaleven Primary School is mothballed with no current pupils. Having considered all the alternatives above, the option to close Achaleven Primary School and realign the catchment area for Lochnell Primary School to include the former Achaleven Primary School catchment area is considered the most reasonable means to address the reasons identified at Section 2 of this report.

#### 10.3.1 Community Impact

The community overwhelmingly supported closure of the school with the suggestion that the building and adjoining grounds could potentially be retained for community use. Within Achaleven there is a Village Hall which houses community events. All people who attended the Options Appraisal Meeting stated that if possible they would prefer to see the school building retained for community use and not allowed to fall in to further disrepair, as that would adversely impact on the community's access to the premises and the visual impact of the village. It is accepted that a school closure may have an adverse effect on a community. Formal closure of the school would mean that future plans for the building could potentially be progressed by the community.

#### 10.3.2 Travel Arrangements

The travel distance (sourced from Google maps) from Achaleven Primary to Lochnell Primary is 3.6 miles via the A85 and A828. Travel time is approximately 8 minutes. The travel arrangements have been in place for 18 months. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Achaleven community. Pupils will travel on the existing West Coast Motors service bus and eventually all the pupils will travel to Lochnell Primary School. The environmental impact of travel will be minimal, as these arrangements are currently in place due to the mothballing of Achaleven Primary School. The closure of Achaleven Primary School, in terms of travel, would have a neutral effect on the environment. There is currently no additional annual transport cost of taking pupils to Lochnell Primary School and the continued use of the existing West Coast Motors service bus would mean there are no future cost implications.

### **10.4 Financial Impact**

The main elements included within a school budget are Teacher employment costs (ie basic salary costs plus related employer's National Insurance and Superannuation contributions plus any relevant individual allowances); Local Government employee costs and an allocation for discretionary expenditure incurred by the school (i.e. educational equipment, materials, staff travel, etc.). Teacher staffing budgets are calculated on an annual basis and within the Primary sector are determined, taking cognisance of the SNCT class size maxima, by the number of classes required to provide for the specific number and age of the pupils in each school. When a school ceases to be operational

the Teacher staffing budget is adjusted (at the appropriate time), per entitlement information from Education HR, with the staffing budget resulting in a nil value. As a result of the authority's policy for no Teacher redundancies it is presumed that the staff are deployed elsewhere within the authority and therefore their salary costs still exist with an increase to the receiving school's budget. This is also in line with the national priority of maintaining teacher numbers. This methodology also applies to the school's discretionary budget which again is formula based. The budget of the receiving school, in terms of any pupils being transferred, will have increased. The figures outlined below take account of the fact that the staffing and discretionary budgets have been adjusted to nil.

The annual running costs during mothballing of Achaleven Primary School are a total of **£5,400**.

Annual savings generated through closing Achaleven Primary School would be **£5,400**.

The costs/savings outlined above assumes all revenue expenditure would cease. This includes non-domestic rates, utility costs, insurances, etc. If the school was to be formally closed, this would allow the Council to take steps towards selling the school to a third party or the local community.

## **10.5 Environmental Impact**

Currently some pupils travel to Lochnell Primary. However this option would have a neutral environmental impact on the current position and would have no impact on the current travel arrangements for staff and pupils. Eventually all pupils will attend Lochnell Primary School, a relatively short journey. Travel is an accepted aspect of rural life.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

Four alternative options have been reviewed in considering the future of Achaleven Primary School. For each option, information was collated and consideration was given to:

- Community feedback;
- Pupil numbers;
- Financial Information;
- Assessment of rural factors, including community impact, economic impact and travel arrangements, and
- Educational Benefits.

An authority that is contemplating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in Section 12A of the 2010 Act before formulating a proposal.

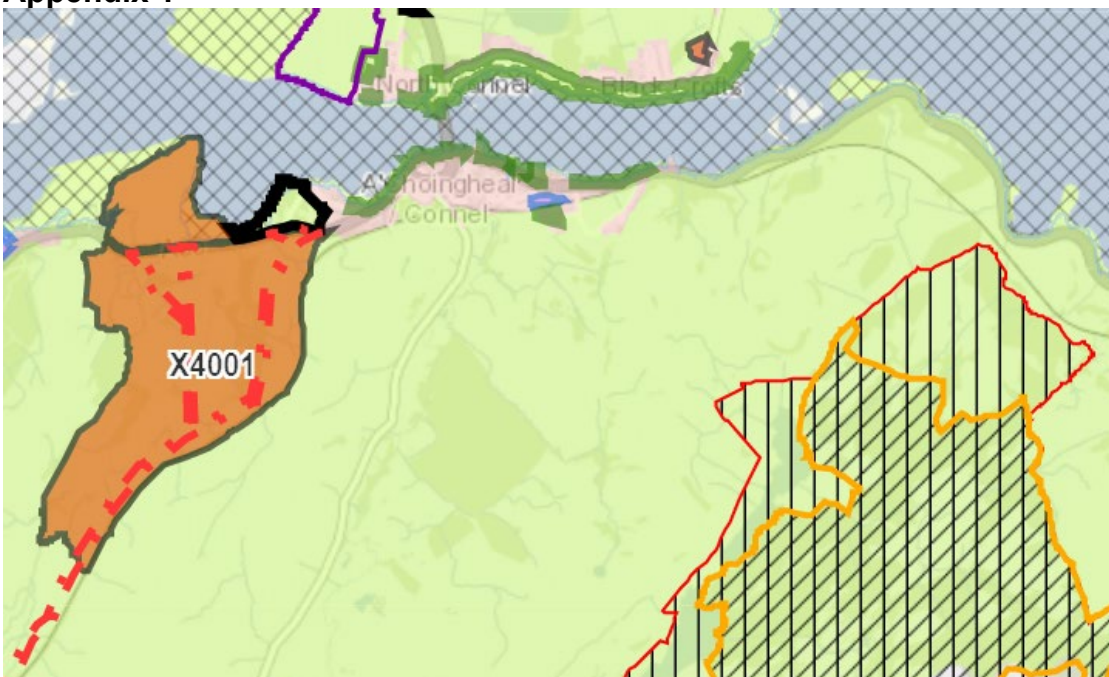
After consideration of the preliminary requirements, as set out in the Act, and the options, and having regard to the specific reasons identified at Section 2 of this report, closing Achaleven Primary School and realigning the catchment

area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area for Achaleven Primary School is the most reasonable option in order to address the underlying reasons for the possible proposal.

Members are asked to:

- Note the outcome of this consideration of the preliminary requirements; and
- Agree that Officers now formulate a draft closure proposal that will come back to a future meeting of the Committee in August 2023 for approval by Members which would subsequently trigger the formal consultation process under the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

## Appendix 1

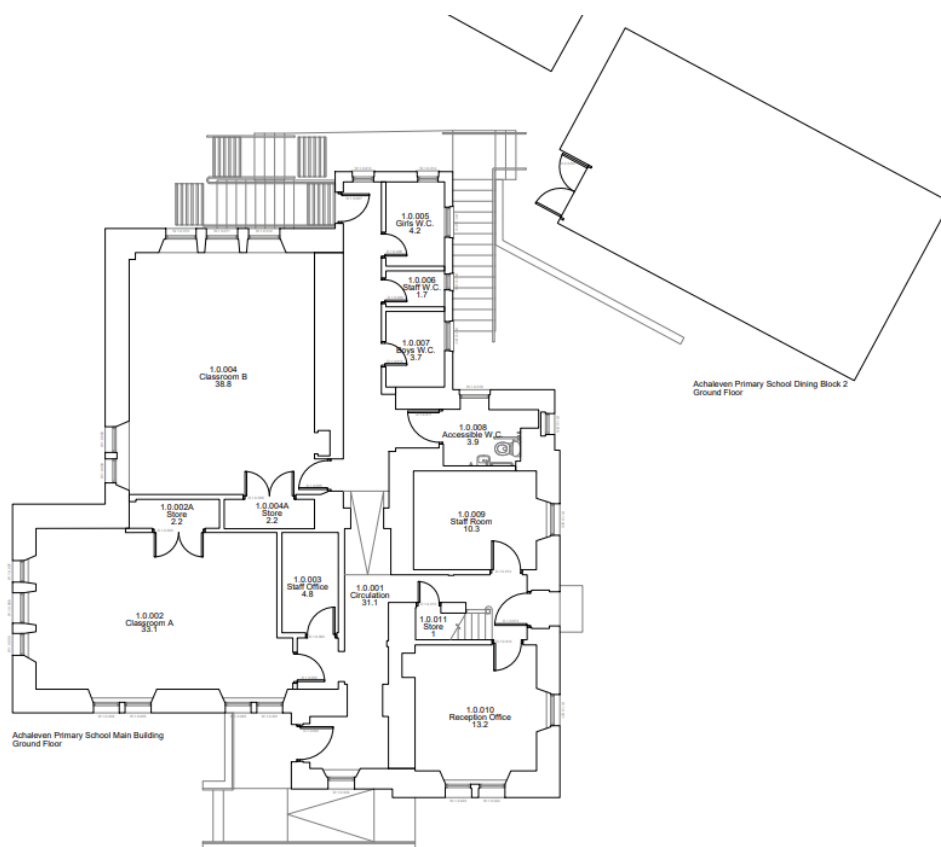


## Appendix 2

## Development Management Zones

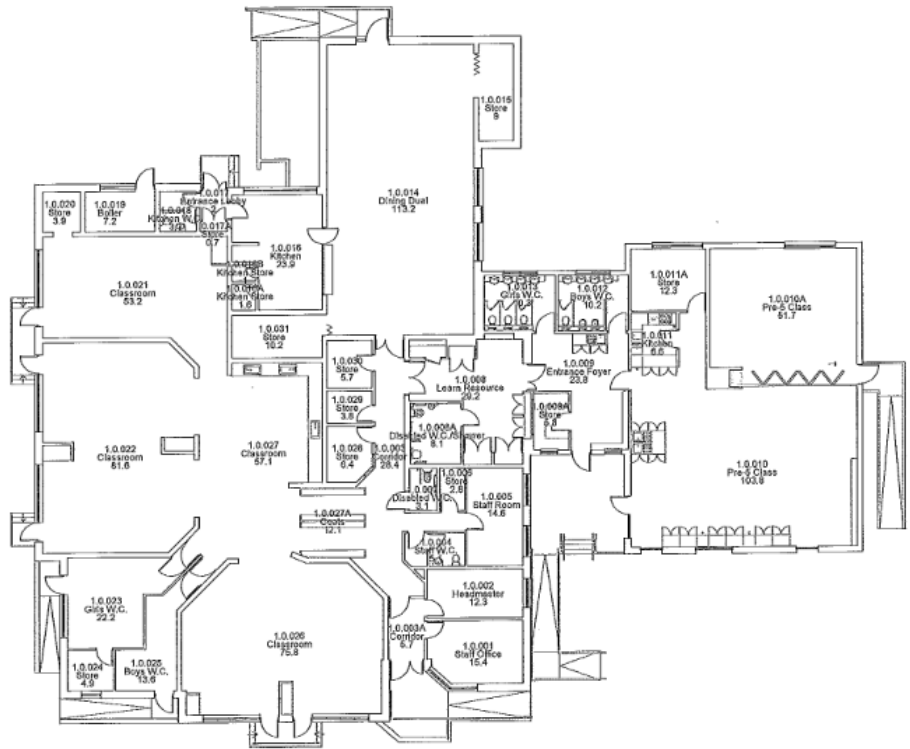
-  Countryside Zone
-  Greenbelt
-  Rural Opportunity Area
-  Settlement Zone - Main Town
-  Settlement Zone - Key Settlement
-  Settlement Zone - Key Rural Settlement
-  Settlement Zone - Village / Minor Settlement
- Very Sensitive Countryside

## Appendix 3: Floorplan Achaleven Primary School



Current Main Block GFA Jan 2016 = 173.6m <sup>2</sup>	
Client	Armagh City Council
Customer Services	Property Design Team
Phone: 01546 633 127	http://www.armaghcitycouncil.gov.uk
Site	Achaleven Primary School
Location	Postcode PA37 1PH
Project	---
Drawing	Current Ground Floor Plan
Site UPDs	Project No.
PE12000010001	---
Drawing No.	Revision
AEL(00)001	---
Drawn By	Date
mm	Jan 2016
Scale @ A0	1:50

## Appendix 4: Floorplan Lochnell Primary School



Lechnell Primary School Main Building  
Ground Floor Plan

Rev	Date	Description	Drawn By
-	01/03/14	-	-

Customer Services  
Property Design Team

Phone: 01546 607127  
<http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk>

**Argyll  
Bute  
COUNCIL**

Site  
Lochnell Primary School

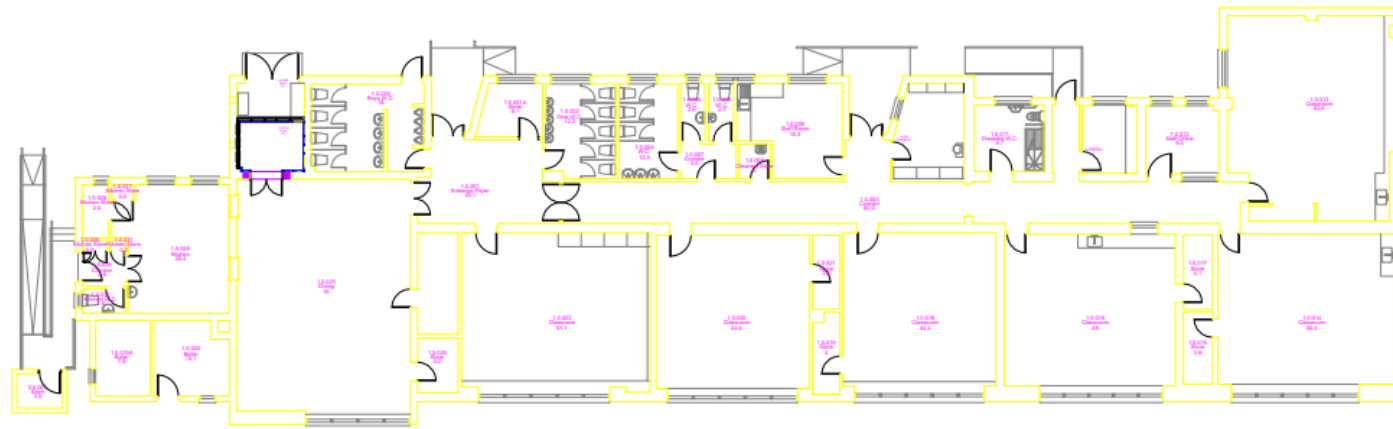
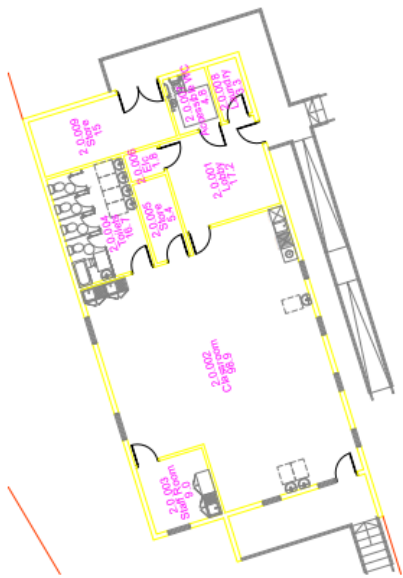
Location Ledaig	Postcode PA37 1RZ
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Project  
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Drawing  
Current Ground Floor Plan

Site UPRN PE04705890001	Project No. ---
Drawing No. AEL(00)001	Revision ---

Drawn By RHH	Date January 2014	Scale @ A1 1:100
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Proposed Plan  
Scale: 1:100

No.	Date	Description	Drawn By
Customer Services Property Design Team			
			
Phone: (01546) 652127 http://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk			
Site Dunbeg Primary School			
Location ---		Postcode PA37 1QF	
Project 1140 Hours			
Drawing Proposed Plan			
Site UPRN PE05502850001		Project No. 00321	
Drawing No. APL-00-002		Revision ---	
Drawn By FJH	Date Feb 2020	Scale @ A1 As Shown	

## Appendix 5: Floorplan Dunbeg Primary School and ELC

