



THE SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES
OPTIONS APPRAISAL REPORT



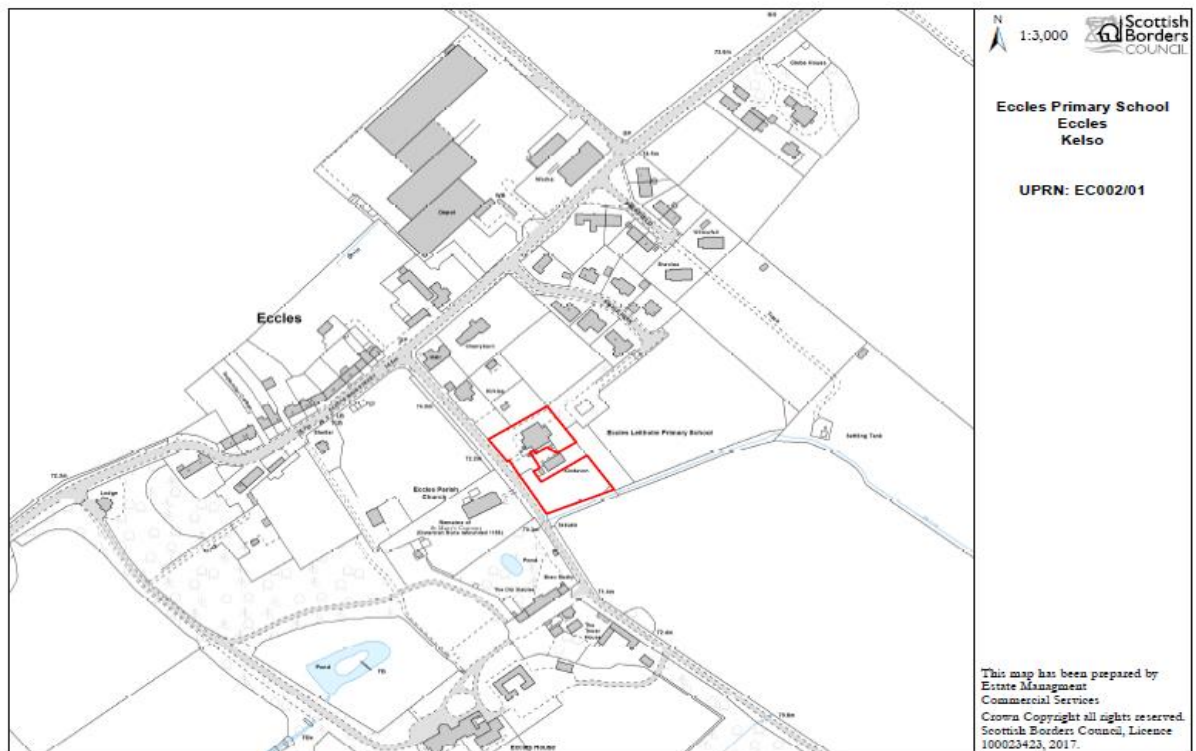
ECCLES LEITHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Scottish Borders Council commenced a School Estate Review in 2015, of all the schools across the region, seeking to deliver the maximum educational benefits for all the children and young people in the area. On 7 November 2017, the Council's Executive (Education) Committee approved amended guiding principles to the School Estate Review to ensure that a strategic approach is taken whilst delivering:
- increased education and learning opportunities for all generations within the community;
 - improved outcomes for the community;
 - sustainability;
 - a future-proof school estate; and
 - affordability.
- 1.2 In November 2017, the Council's Executive (Education) Committee also agreed to review the schools that had been previously mothballed and make a decision on their future. In order to determine what the next steps should be. Council officers have carried out detailed option analyses in respect of each school, considering all reasonable options. The analyses also consider the impact of each of the options on the wider community. This process adheres to the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 (**2010 Act**) - which contains specific provisions regarding rural schools.
- 1.3 This report details the options analysis process for Eccles Leitholm Primary School which was mothballed in 2016.

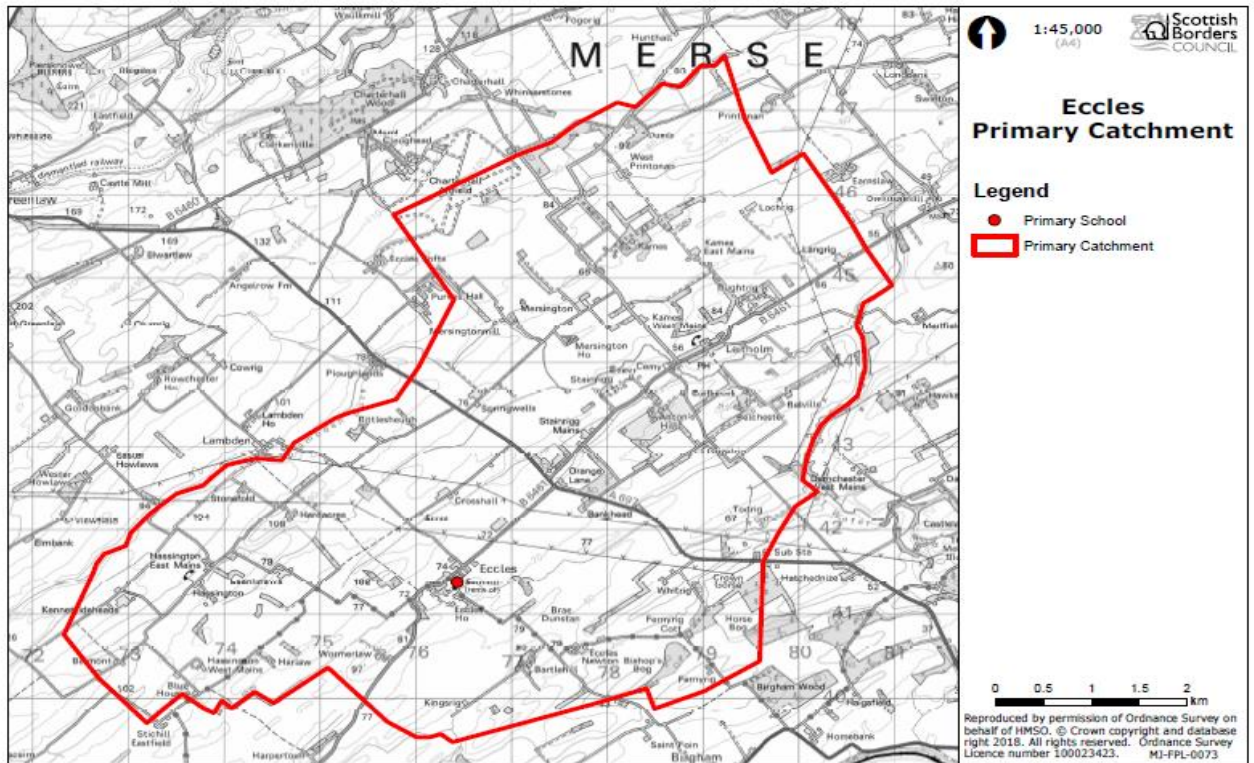
2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Eccles Leitholm Primary School, Eccles, is a non-denominational primary school. It opened in 1964 and had capacity for 50 pupils. The school is in the catchment for Berwickshire High School and lies within the Berwickshire learning cluster of schools. The school has been designated as an accessible rural school by the Scottish Government¹. Its location is shown on this map:-



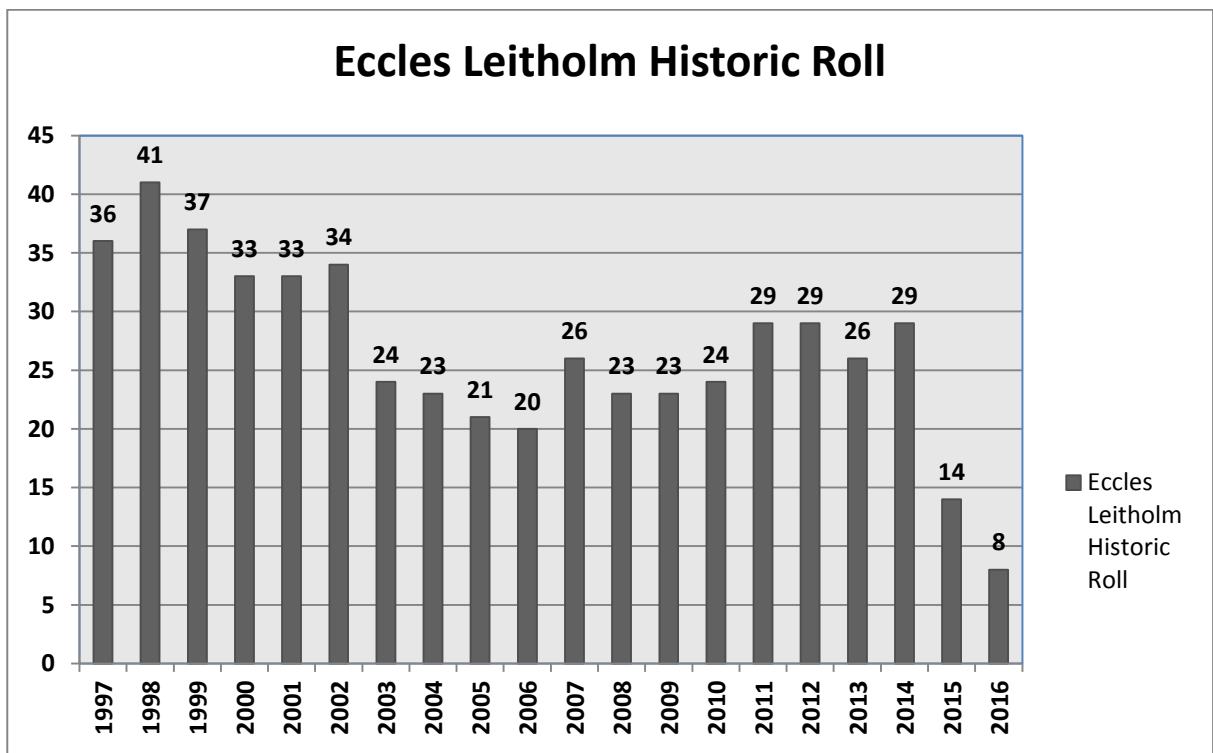
¹ [Scottish Government Rural Schools 2017](#)

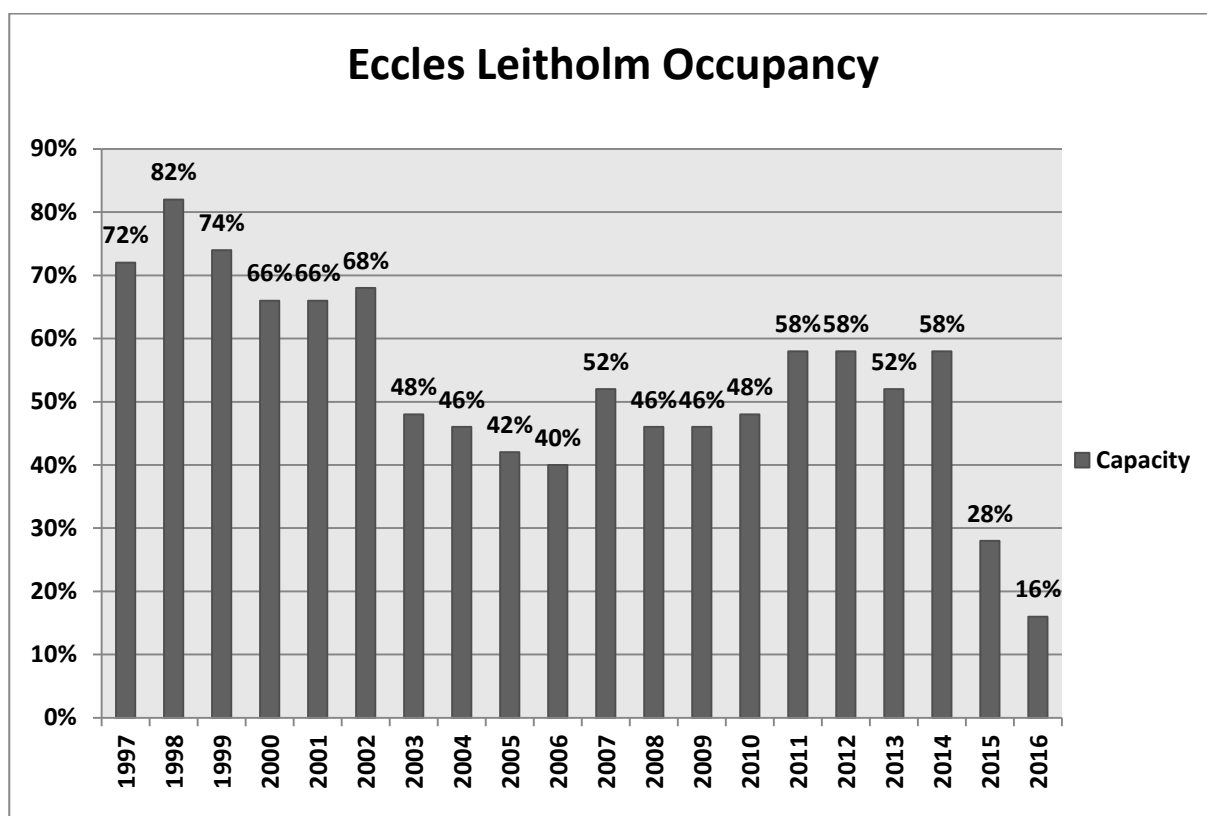
2.2 Eccles Leitholm’s catchment area is shown below:-



2.3 In August 2013 there were 29 pupils attending the school in 2 classes. Despite only 3 children transferring to high school, the roll dropped dramatically in the next school year to 14 pupils - 6 had made placing requests and 6 pupils had left the area. Session 2015/16 started with a roll of 8, but this had decreased to 5 by April 2016. The School roll was forecast to fall to 3 pupils for 2016/17. Given the school capacity of 50 pupils this would have meant occupancy of the school was only 6%.

2.4 The school roll and occupancy levels are shown below:-





2.5 In May 2016 there were 5 pupils at the school, with no pupils enrolled in P 1-3.

Primary 4	2 pupils
Primary 5	1 pupil
Primary 7	2 pupils

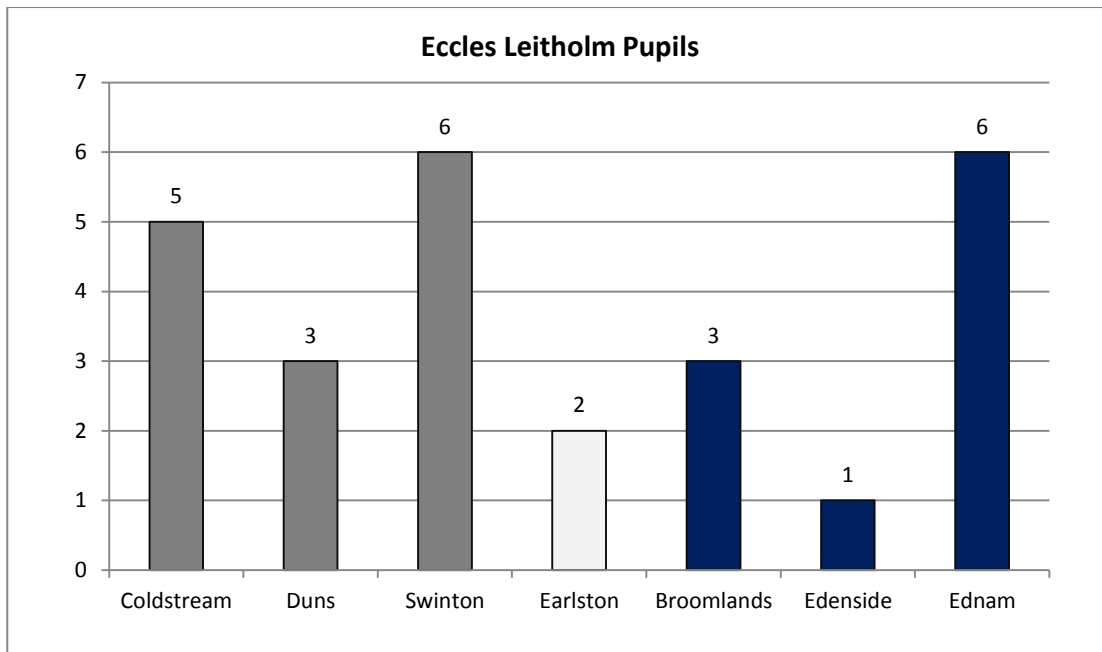
2.6 There had been an emerging pattern of placement requests to other schools.

	New Placing Requests	School	Roll	% of Catchment
2013 - 2014	2	Edenside PS	29	
	1	Duns PS		
	1	Broomlands PS		
Total	4			12%
2014 - 2015	3	Duns PS	14	
	2	Ednam PS		
	1	Swinton PS		
Total	6			30%
2015 - 2016	2	Duns PS	8	
	1	Coldstream PS		
	1	Edenside PS		
	1	Swinton PS		
Total	5			38%

2.7 Given the considerable drop in the school roll, the lack of enrolment of Primary 1 pupils for 3 years and the number of placement requests being made, Council officers recognised that Eccles Leitholm Primary School was at risk. Discussions were held with the local councillors initially to consider all the options available regarding the school. It was recognised that there

were challenges in providing a positive school experience to such a small roll and it was decided that parental opinion should be sought.

- 2.8 The parents recognised a number of issues relating to the size of Eccles Leitholm and the impact that that could have on their children's education. These included difficulties for children to form wide friendship groups with similar interests; anticipated difficulties with transition to High School; lack of opportunities for sports and arts; lack of links into a network of clubs and activities. Potential educational benefits were discussed should the children be able to attend a larger primary school: greater opportunities for socialisation; collaborative learning and greater opportunities for participation in team activities and greater opportunities to experience the skills and abilities of a wider staff group. There was also recognition that the children were not able to fully participate in the Curriculum for Excellence as opportunities for collaboration and peer working among learners were limited.
- 2.9 Following these discussions, the families of the remaining pupils chose to make placing requests to other schools in the area, which were granted. As a result of these placing requests no pupils were enrolled to attend the school in the 2016/2017 session.
- 2.10 In May 2016, Scottish Borders Council's Executive Committee agreed that Eccles Leitholm Primary School be mothballed for an interim period. The position of the school was to be monitored on an ongoing basis; with a decision to be made regarding the future of the school once all options had been assessed.
- 2.11 It was apparent that the placing requests that the parents/carers had made were to a number of different schools (15 children attending 6 schools), as the Council had supported choice as far as possible. Council officers considered a number of factors (distance, travel times, safe routes to school, transition, staff and parental wishes) before making a proposal regarding the temporary rezoning of the Eccles Leitholm catchment.
- 2.12 Eccles Leitholm was a partner school with Coldstream Primary School and they had a shared head teacher. Pupils from Eccles Leitholm regularly accessed facilities and activities in Coldstream Primary. The schools were both within the same secondary cluster (Berwickshire) and worked in the same learning community. Improvement plans were aligned across the 2 schools, along with curricular and teaching plans. It was therefore considered by the Council at this time that this would result in an easy transition for pupils from Eccles Leitholm into classes at Coldstream and that their learning continuity and progression would be supported. The catchment area for Eccles Leitholm was therefore rezoned to Coldstream Primary School and transportation was provided for the children to their new school.
- 2.13 There are currently 26 primary aged children living in the Eccles Leitholm's original catchment area, attending 7 different primary schools located in the Berwickshire cluster (Coldstream, Duns and Swinton) and the Kelso cluster (Broomlands, Edenside and Ednam) and the Earlston cluster. There were 6 Primary 1 aged pupils starting school this year from the catchment – 67% of them have chosen Swinton Primary School. No P1 child from the Eccles Leitholm's original catchment chose to attend Coldstream Primary School.



2.14 There currently 12 pre-school aged children within the Eccles Leitholm catchment who are attending 5 different Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) settings across several locations. Prior to mothballing there was not an ELC setting at the Eccles Leitholm.

2.15 In February 2016 the Council launched a Pre-consultation and Review of its School Estate, promoted through letters issued to every family group via school mail, all school user groups, elected members and Community Councils. Press releases, social media updates, posters and school newsletters were used to advertise the pre-consultation events. Nine consultation events were held, one in each High School. This included a review of the mothballed schools.

3. AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

3.1 Eccles Leitholm Primary School is situated in Eccles, Berwickshire within the Scottish Borders. The village of Leitholm is a 2.5 miles to the northeast of Eccles. Both villages are located less than 7 miles from Coldstream. As can be seen across the Scottish Borders, the area has witnessed a significant change in local population demographics. We have analysed data derived from the National Records of Scotland. We have considered data from 2 larger areas which comprise the Eccles Leitholm catchment zone. While this data does not directly reflect actual movements within the catchment area, it reflects population changes in the larger area.

Year		Swinton Leitholm and Fogo Area	%	Gordon and Hume Area	%
2011	0 to 15	177	18%	212	21%
	16 to 64	611	64%	577	58%
	65+	173	18%	209	21%
	All people	961		998	
2017	0 to 15	132	15%	204	19%
	16 to 64	555	63%	615	58%
	65+	199	22%	250	23%
	All people	886		1069	

3.2 As the table above shows there has been a decline in the number of children within the area since the start of the decade, with the number of children in the Swinton, Leitholm and Fogo area declining by 25% and in Gordon and Hume by less than 4%. Overall the population in the Swinton and Leitholm area has only declined by 8% where the Gordon and Hume population has grown by 7%. Noticeably the population is aging in both areas.

- 3.3 The villages of Eccles & Leitholm fall within the Eastern Housing Market Area, while parts of the catchment area fall within the Central Housing Market Area, both as identified within the Scottish Borders Council Local Development Plan 2016 (**LDP**). The LDP allocates 2 housing sites within Eccles, namely: Cherryburn and Main Street. The former allocated housing site has an indicative site capacity of 7 units and the latter 5 units. One site is allocated within Leitholm, on Main Street. The allocated housing site has an indicative site capacity of 25 units. The Housing Land Audit (HLA) 2017 programmes the 12 units in Eccles to be built in 2021 and 2022. This has been informed using past completion rates and the lack of developer interest to date. The larger site in Leitholm is programmed to release 5 units a year from 2021. This level of development could be estimated to add pupils to the school rolls. However, taking on board the programming contained within the HLA, the delivery of housing within the area could be spread over several LDP periods.
- 3.4 In terms of potential new business ventures in the area, there have been no enquiries to the council's business & economic development team. They have advised that there are unlikely to be any significant changes to the population relative to Eccles & Leitholm Primary school catchment area as a result of business growth

4 OPTIONS ANALYSIS

- 4.1 Scottish Government guidance indicates that local authorities should review a mothballed school within 3 years of mothballing. In order to determine the options available regarding the future of the school, Council officers have identified several potential options and assessed these to assist in identifying the most reasonable option to make a proposal to Councillors. The analyses has taken consideration of the provisions of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended (**2010 Act**); in particular the provisions regarding rural schools.
- 4.2 A number of possible options were identified for the future of Eccles Leitholm Primary School namely:

Option 1	Reopen Eccles Leitholm Primary School with its original catchment area
Option 2	Reopen Eccles Leitholm Primary School with an expanded catchment area
Option 3	Continue mothballing Eccles Leitholm Primary School, with the catchment continuing to be zoned to Coldstream Primary School
Option 4	Permanently close Eccles Leitholm Primary School, rezoning the catchment area to either Coldstream Primary School <u>or</u> Swinton Primary School

5 OPTION 1

REOPEN ECCLES LEITHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH ITS ORIGINAL CATCHMENT AREA

Demand

- 5.1 To assess whether it would be a reasonable proposal to re-open the school, officers examined available information on the number of pre-school and primary aged children in the catchment area. Current records indicate there are currently 26 primary pupils in the catchment area, attending 7 different primary schools. There are also 12 pre-school aged children living in the catchment attending 5 different Early Learning and Childcare settings.

Eccles Leitholm Pupils' School Choices		
High School Cluster		
Berwickshire	Coldstream Primary	19%
	Duns Primary	12%
	Swinton Primary	23%
Earlston	Earlston Primary	8%
Kelso	Broomlands Primary	12%
	Edenside Primary	4%
	Ednam Primary	23%

- 5.2 Pupil numbers had fallen dramatically before Eccles Leitholm Primary school was mothballed – a fall of almost 90% in the 5 year period preceding mothballing. It was also evident that immediately prior to mothballing that almost 90% of catchment pupils were choosing to attend an out of catchment school; while this may have been for numerous reasons it does indicate a significant drift from the school. The Council has not received any enquiries regarding enrolment at the school since mothballing and during the pre- consultation process in 2016, there were no comments made regarding the school.
- 5.3 From meetings with the community council and discussions with the community we have been unable to identify demand within the community for the school to be reopened. It is not certain how many or if any of the pupils from Eccles Leitholm Primary School catchment area would chose return to the school if it were it to reopen.

Condition and Suitability

- 5.4 The most recent condition survey was carried out on the building in 2012 rated the site as Condition B (performing well but showing minor deterioration). Condition is an assessment of physical condition of the school and its grounds. The suitability of was categorised as B (performing well but with minor problems) with elements of C (Poor). Suitability as an assessment of the school as a whole, its buildings, its grounds and the impacts these have on the learning and teaching, leisure and social activities and health and wellbeing of all users. It is currently estimated that approximately £109,000 would be required to remedy the current defects in the school building. If the school was to re-open is likely that pupils will still be required to access Coldstream Primary School to share facilities and to participate in aspects of the Curriculum for Excellence.

Educational Benefits

- 5.5 The potential Educational Benefits were considered if the school was to be re-opened.

Pros

- A smaller school can play an important role in the community and provide opportunities for members of the community to become involved in learning. Closer ties to the community can provide specific learning opportunities and experiences which can enhance the sense of community across the generations.
- Students at small schools may be engaged in their school community, leading to a sense of personal responsibility for the community. Pupils may have greater exposure to friends across a wider age range, which can assist with social skills and development
- Students at small schools can develop strong relationships with their peers and their teachers. This can increase confidence and reduce the fear of making mistakes
- The nature of composite classes can encourage pupils to work together across the age ranges and abilities which can have a positive impact on all learners
- Travel time to school may be less which then allow more time for pupils for homework, hobbies and out of school activities.

Cons

- Pupils attending a school with a small peer group may not be able to experience a variety of learning and teaching experiences offered through flexibility of groupings.
- A small roll can result in a smaller number of staff and parent body reducing the opportunity of adults leading a range of activities to support the provision of a richer and higher quality curriculum. This can reduce the likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wide range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities when compared with a school with a larger roll.
- As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills. Such knowledge and understanding of skills acquisition can benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age and stage. This would be very difficult to achieve in a small school roll.
- The level to which pupils are able to have social interaction can be impacted by the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem can be enhanced through being part of an age-appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interaction and relationships to form and reform. The pupils in the Eccles Leitholm catchment currently all attend larger schools which can provide increased opportunity for social interaction and wider friendship groups.
- A small roll can restrict opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities as well as participation in individual sports. Whilst some of these problems can be overcome by taking pupils to participate in activities in a neighbouring school, that in itself involves time out of school travelling there and back. As was seen, prior to mothballing, the partnership between Eccles Leitholm and Coldstream primaries did not boost the roll number at Eccles Leitholm but in fact increased the number of placement requests as children wished more access to the facilities at other schools.
- A smaller roll and a smaller peer group may result in pupils requiring more support in the transition to secondary school.

Educational Benefits and Impacts on Staff

- 5.8 While it is recognised that some staff may prefer working in a small team, it must be noted that staff recruitment and retention can be more challenging in a very small school. Potentially staff could feel more isolated in a single teacher school and may not be able to receive the same support in providing an inclusive curriculum and nor be able to work collaboratively with other teachers. Staff can benefit from being part of a larger team and being able to share planning and curricular resources and also learning from each other.

Rural Factors – Travel Arrangements

- 5.9 Following the decision to mothball Eccles Leitholm Primary School in 2016 the Council agreed to provide school transportation to all pupils, who resided in the Eccles Leitholm catchment area, attending Coldstream Primary School. These travel arrangements have been in place for over 2 years. There are currently 5 children from the Eccles Leitholm catchment area attending Coldstream Primary School. The impact for some children is that it has resulted in a longer home to school journey, while for others it has shortened the journey. If this proposal was to go ahead and parents and children took up the option to return to Eccles Leitholm Primary School this provision may require to be altered however as has been stated above this may result for some children in longer journeys and some children in shorter journeys versus the status quo of them currently going to Coldstream Primary School. If the decision was taken to re-open the school, future pupils in the Eccles Leitholm catchment would no longer be provided funded transport to Coldstream but would only be provided transportation to their catchment school, if appropriate. Pupils currently attending Coldstream and any younger siblings enrolling at the school (while the older sibling continues to attend) would still receive funded transport to and from school.
- 5.10 It is recognised that adverse weather in the winter currently impacts on travel arrangements in this area. There are likely to be issues in the area because of the rural nature of the location. Headteachers take into account the local circumstances when deciding to close the school

and/or send pupils home early. There is an emergency closure plan for severe weather in place for all schools across the region.

Rural Factors – Community Impact Community Feedback

- 5.11 At the time of mothballing, the community in general viewed the mothballing as appropriate. Subsequent interaction has indicated that people do not wish the mothballing to continue indefinitely and are supportive of a final decision being made. The general consensus was that there was concern that a school with a small roll the size of Eccles Leitholm's at the point of mothballing (3 pupils) could impact on the breadth of their children's education. The Community considered that the building could be better utilised and that resources were being wasted by keeping the school mothballed and wished to consider long term plans regarding the use of the building.
- 5.12 From our discussions it would appear that children attending other schools are happy with their current arrangement and the impression is that the school has already been closed.
- 5.13 The school was not used for external lets prior to being mothballed; there was no use of the building outwith school hours, other than in respect of school meetings. Since mothballing there has continued to be no community use of the building. We have been advised that the halls in both Eccles and Leitholm serve the community requirements and opinions have been expressed that the school building should be used for another purpose; the exact purpose is as yet unclear. Some members of the community view the freeing up of the building through closure of the school as a potential opportunity and enquiries have been received in this regard.

Financial Impact

- 5.14 The backlog maintenance costs at Eccles Leitholm are currently estimated to be £108,845. This would remedy the current issues; it is very likely that other costs would be incurred to re-open the building as a school. The facilities at the school would be adequate but there would most likely still be a requirement to share facilities with Coldstream Primary School for ICT and PE. Based on the pupil numbers at the point of mothballing (5), it is estimated that it would cost c£31,000 per pupil to operate the school. The average in the Borders is c£4,000 per annum.

Environmental Impact

- 5.15 The reduced travel for some of the children to Eccles Leitholm Primary would be cancelled out by the impact of reinstating services having to travel further to access the school
- 5.16 The school building at Eccles is dated and has a flat roof. It is considered that it would be expensive to reinstate and to operate. In addition the children would still require to be transported to Coldstream Primary School for certain lessons and activities.

CONCLUSION:

- 5.17 We have been unable to identify a demand within the community to re-open the school; the parents/carers appear satisfied with the education and experiences that their children receive at their current schools.
- 5.18 In line with other rural areas there has been a decline in the population the 0-15s age group as working patterns change across the country, with many rural schools witnessing a decline in pupil numbers
- 5.19 In terms of the current arrangements, Coldstream has good facilities and with strong educational outcomes and experiences. However less than 20% of the Eccles Leitholm catchment are choosing this school. The facilities offered at Eccles Leitholm, after investment to improve the school to a functional standard, would not be of a similar standard to those at Coldstream. It is considered that while Eccles Leitholm reopening would be likely to allow for

greater involvement with the Eccles and Leitholm communities, the pupils within the catchment are currently benefitting from the facilities and schools in nearby larger towns which have strong links with the wider communities. It could be considered that there would be educational disadvantages in reopening Eccles Leitholm Primary School with a small school roll versus the current education provision. The catchment pupils are attending a variety of schools; most of which still provide the opportunity for smaller class sizes and composite classes, which cannot exceed 25 pupils. Many of the educational benefits considered to arise from attending a smaller rural school also apply to the schools that the children are currently attending, with close bonds across year groups and opportunities to collaborate across the age range. It is considered that few children and parents would be likely to support the resultant change in their catchment area to Eccles Leitholm, which had seen a significant number of placement requests away from the school year on year prior to mothballing.

5.20 Travel arrangements for pupils have been in place for some time and the impacts are fairly neutral in terms of some pupils having to travel further and some less than before.

5.22 In conclusion it is not considered a reasonable or sustainable option to re-open Eccles Leitholm Primary School with its original catchment zone.

6 OPTION 2 REOPEN ECCLES LEITHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REDELINEATE THE CATCHMENT AREA

6.1 Given the questions raised in **Option 1** about levels of demand in the area for the school to be re-opened, it was deemed reasonable to consider whether expanding the catchment area would be a reasonable option to allow the school to be re-opened to provide a viable primary school for an enlarged catchment.

Catchment Area Options

6.2 A mapping analysis of pupil addresses has been carried out to identify whether the catchment area for Eccles Leitholm could be made more sustainable by extending it into one or more of the neighbouring catchment areas of Coldstream, Greenlaw or Swinton. Given that Eccles Leitholm is in the secondary catchment for Berwickshire High School, it was considered that the exercise should be limited to schools within the same cluster as any change to secondary catchments would be a significant undertaking, requiring extensive consultation and it could be argued that it could prove challenging to establish the Educational Benefits for such a proposal. As these schools are all located in rural area, the geography and options in relation to safe travel are limited. The summary of the findings is as follows:

- Coldstream Primary School currently has 127 pupils, which equates to 65% occupancy of the school. A significant majority of pupils live either in or very close to the village. 4% of the pupils attending Coldstream reside in the former Eccles Leitholm catchment zone. The mapping exercise has confirmed that almost all of the pupils living close to the boundary of Eccles Leitholm and Coldstream's catchment areas live closer to Coldstream Primary School. Where children live closer to Eccles Leitholm it is marginal and the routes to Coldstream are more established. It is considered that it would be unlikely that a choice would be made to attend Eccles Leitholm, in preference to Coldstream, as the journey times would be roughly the same and Eccles Leitholm would have lesser facilities and the curriculum offer would not be as full.
- Greenlaw Primary School currently has 51 pupils, which equates to 51% of capacity within the school. The mapping exercise did not identify any pupils that live closer to Eccles Leitholm than Greenlaw, so it is considered that there would not be support for a catchment change.
- Swinton Primary School Community currently has 55 pupils, which equates to 55% of capacity. Currently 11% of these pupils reside in the Eccles Leitholm catchment area. The mapping exercise did not identify any pupils that live closer to Eccles Leitholm than Swinton so it is considered that there would not be support for a catchment change. In addition, reducing the number of pupils attending Swinton Primary School may in turn impact on its sustainability, resulting in more parents/carers choosing to send their children to other schools.

- 6.3 From our analysis of the postcodes of the school aged children it is not considered likely that there would be a significant demand for spaces at a re-opened Eccles Leitholm Primary School. Almost all the pupils that reside near the catchment boundaries currently have shorter and quicker journeys to their current catchment school. Given the geography of the area careful consideration has been paid to the distance of journeys and to safe routes to school; it is the Council's policy to support placement requests wherever possible and officers have been unable to identify a reasonable proposal that could be consulted upon to expand Eccles Leitholm catchment area.

Educational Benefits

- 6.4 In order to change a catchment area a statutory consultation would be required in terms of the 2010 Act. A proposal paper for the consultation would require to detail the Educational Benefits attached to the proposal. It is not considered that there would be any significant educational benefits arising from a proposal to change any or all of the above catchment zones. It is also considered that a proposal to amend the catchment zones of Coldstream, Greenlaw and/or Swinton Primary School would be unlikely to receive support from those communities.
- 6.5 As was identified in **Option 1** that the re-opening of Eccles Leitholm would be likely to allow for greater involvement within that community however educationally it could be argued that there are few other educational reasons to change the current catchment zones.

Educational Benefits and Impacts on Staff

- 6.6 These will be the same as **Option 1**.

Rural Factors – Travel Arrangements

- 6.7 The re-opening of the school and increasing the catchment would most likely result in shorter journeys for some and longer for others. Any decision to change catchment would require careful consideration of safe routes to school. In addition this would be likely to result in increased costs to the Council. Currently journeys are often planned to transport children to both primary and secondary schools; changing the catchment would result in some children travelling in the opposite direction, which would be likely to increase the costs, times and environmental impact.

Rural Factors – Community Impact

- 6.8 The impact on the community requires careful consideration of the positive and negative impact that amending catchment zones may have on all affected communities. The biggest impact in amending the catchment area could be felt in 3 rural communities. The re-opening of the school with an increased catchment might have a positive impact on the local community of Eccles and Leitholm. However this would depend on the level of enrolment at the school. Given the geography of the local catchment zones and the impact those changing catchment zones may have on the other villages it is not considered that there would be support to change the catchment nor strong demand to enrol at Eccles Leitholm Primary School.

Financial Impact

- 6.9 As in **Option 1**.

Environmental Impact

- 6.10 The reduced travel for some of the children to Eccles Leitholm Primary would be cancelled out by:-
- the requirement for procurement of new transport which may be against the direction of travel of most journeys going to the Secondary school
 - services and staff having to travel further to access Eccles Leitholm Primary School.

CONCLUSION:

6.11 Following the mapping exercise, it is unlikely that the catchment area could be made more sustainable with the options examined; this is because most pupils in the neighbouring catchment areas live closer to their current catchment school or would be most likely to have a quicker and safer journey to school. It is therefore not considered a reasonable option given that this would require a successful Statutory Consultation with identified Educational Benefits. No evidence of demand to attend Eccles Leitholm Primary School has been identified and there appears to be satisfaction with the current primary schools attended. Accordingly the option to amend/extend the Eccles Leitholm catchment area is not considered a reasonable option.

7 OPTION 3 CONTINUE MOTHBALLING ECCLES LEITHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL

- 7.1 This option considers whether the school should continue to be mothballed as re-opening is not immediately viable but may be reasonably viable in the future. The school has been mothballed for almost 3 years. 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 reopen a school there, but it is unlikely that it should exceed three years in areas that are not very remote.”*
- 7.2 Pupil numbers are not projected to increase over the next four years. There has been a downward trend in the number of people under 16 living in the catchment area in recent years. This reflects a change in demographics seen across rural area in the region. There are few new homes projected to be built in the area and their impact is not considerable significant to projected figures given the predicted protracted development timelines.

Community Impact

- 7.3 There was a significant view at the community meetings that mothballing the school over a long period was wasteful it was also the view at the community meetings that the school was already viewed as closed. There have been a number of suggestions for how the building could be utilised in the future. The negative impacts as outlined in respect of the closure of the school would largely remain, but there would be the added uncertainty of it being mothballed and without it being able to be put to more fully put to other uses or potentially being transferred to the community. The community is keen to have the school building closed so that it can be put to an alternative use. There is therefore little argument for continuing the mothballing.

Financial Impact

- 7.4 The financial impact of the decision to continue mothballing the school is not quantifiable at this stage; however the building will continue to deteriorate through lack of use over time which may have a negative impact on the neighbourhood and ultimately result in greater expense for the Council or any new proprietor once a final decision is made regarding the future of the school.

Environmental Impact

- 7.5 N/A

Summary

- 7.6 The school has been mothballed for almost 3 years. Pupil numbers are not projected to rise in terms of pre-school children living within the catchment and there is no significant planned housebuilding.
- 7.7 Community member have expressed their disappointment that the school was still mothballed and generally considered it was already in effect closed. They considered that the building could be better utilised and that resources were being wasted by keeping the school

mothballed. The community viewed the long term utilisation of the building by the community or otherwise as an opportunity for the community.

- 7.8 On the basis that pupil numbers will not increase mothballing is not considered a good use of resources and the building could be used to benefit the community, continued mothballing is not viewed as a reasonable option.

8 **OPTION 4**

PERMANENTLY CLOSE ECCLES LEITHOM PRIMARY SCHOOL AND RE-DELINEATE THE CATCHMENT ZONE

- 8.1 This option would result in the permanent closure of the school and the permanent re-delineation of the catchment zone.
- 8.2 In the analysis of **Options 1, 2 and 3** it has been concluded that it would not be reasonable to re-open the school with its current or an extended catchment and that continuing to mothball would not be a reasonable conclusion

Demand for School

- 8.3 Eccles Leitholm Primary School was mothballed in May 2016 after a rapid decline in the school roll (c90% reduction in the 5 years preceding mothballing) and a very significant increase in placement requests to numerous schools across the area. In 2018/19 there 26 primary school aged children residing in the catchment area for Eccles Leitholm Primary School attending 7 different schools. Council officers have not been able to identify a demand for the school to be re-opened and have been advised that the community already considers the school is closed.
- 8.4 There are no areas of housing or business or economic development currently planned or expected that would lead to any significant changes to the population relative to Eccles Leitholm Primary school catchment area that would be likely to generate demand for the school to re-open.

Placement Requests and Catchment Area

- 8.5 Parents/carers have decided to choose several different schools for their children's education, with no one school attracting a majority of placement requests. While it is recognised that there a number of reasons that parents chose a particular school it is evident that there is no clear preference in the area. Currently parents/carers are choosing to enrol 47% of Eccles Leitholm children in primary schools outwith the Berwickshire learning cluster.

Eccles Leitholm Pupils' School Choices		
High School Cluster		
Berwickshire	Coldstream Primary	19%
	Duns Primary	12%
	Swinton Primary	23%
Earlston	Earlston Primary	8%
Kelso	Broomlands Primary	12%
	Edenside Primary	4%
	Ednam Primary	23%

- 8.6 At the time of mothballing the decision was taken to re-delineate the schools catchment to Coldstream Primary, with transport being provided. This decision was made for a number of reasons which included familiarity as pupils attended the school to utilise facilities and to access aspects of the curriculum for excellence; proximity; safe routes to travel; shared head teacher and curriculum. However currently only 5 pupils are attending Coldstream, which equates to only 19% of the original catchment area pupils.
- 8.7 Given that Eccles Leitholm is in the Berwickshire High School catchment it is considered reasonable that only other primary schools within that catchment should be contemplated as

alternatives for re-zoning the Eccles Leitholm catchment area. It is therefore proposed that views should be sought as soon as possible, as part of any statutory consultation process, regarding the catchment zone. Based on the current choice of parents it is proposed that parents should be consulted on whether the catchment is permanently re-zoned to Coldstream Primary School or Swinton Primary School.

Educational Benefits - Impact on Pupils

8.8 The Educational Benefits of delineating the catchment area to either Coldstream or Swinton Primary Schools:-:

8.8.1 Pupils would be attending a school with a larger peer group which will allow more opportunities to experience a variety of learning and teaching experiences offered through flexibility of grouping.

8.8.2 There are and will be greater opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing experiences. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome by taking the pupils to participate in activities in a neighbouring school, that in itself involves time out of school travelling there and back.

8.8.3 There is and will be a larger staff and parent body increases the likelihood of adults leading a range of activities will support the provision of a richer and higher quality curriculum.

8.8.4 As with sports, the larger roll would also provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities.

8.8.5 As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage.

8.8.6 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform.

Educational Benefits - Impact on staff

8.9 As part of a larger team, staff will be able to share planning and curricular resources. They can also learn from each other to provide improved approaches to learning and teaching. Eccles Leitholm as a one teacher school would present challenges in attracting and supporting staff. In Denholm staff will be able to receive support in providing an inclusive curriculum and work together to

Educational Benefits-Impact upon the community

8.10 The closure of Eccles Leitholm Primary school would have little impact in terms of the community's educational access to the school and its resources. The building prior to mothballing was not used by any community groups or organisations and this remains the case post mothballing.

Rural Factors – Impact from Travel Arrangements

8.10 The schools in the area are relatively close, with both Swinton and Coldstream located within c7 miles of Eccles Leitholm Primary School. However given the rurality of the area some journeys may require more time than others.

8.11 Transport is currently provided for children in the Eccles Leitholm catchment attending Coldstream. If the decision is made to change the catchment to Swinton then the funded transport to Coldstream would continue for those pupils currently enrolled at Coldstream and

their siblings (but only if they enrol at the school while the older sibling still attends). Future transport provision would be required to be put in place for Swinton. This cannot yet be quantified until it can be established how many children would require transport and where they reside.

Rural Factors - Community Impact

- 8.12 Council officers have considered the potential impacts upon the community of the school closure. Discussions have been previously with Councillors, the community and the Community Council regarding proposals for the school. The majority of comments from the community was supportive of the mothballing and understood the implications of closure of the school. People were clear about the challenges that faced the community; less employment, fewer families, less pupil and more holiday homes for weekenders. Many people supported the school closure and had suggestions for the building's use after closure. However a number of people did comment that they were sad to see the school go. There was a general feeling that continued mothballing was not an option and that a more final solution was required.
- 8.13 Opportunities for the community arise in terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for future use of the building. The proposed future use of the building is still to be agreed but the Community Council has indicated that the building could be developed into a meaningful asset for the area and beyond.

Financial Implications

- 8.14 The backlog maintenance costs at Eccles Leitholm are currently estimated to be £108,845. This would remedy the current issues; it is very likely that other costs would be incurred to re-open the building as a school. The facilities at the school would be adequate but there would most likely still be a requirement to share facilities with Coldstream Primary School for certain lessons and activities. Based on the pupil numbers at the point of mothballing, it is estimated that it would cost c£31,000 per pupil to operate the school. The average in the Borders is c£4,000 per annum.

Environmental Impact

- 8.15 The environmental impact of the proposal is not considered material. Given the rurality of the area many of the pupils all require to be transported to school. However operating another school which is not designed to be environmentally efficient will have some negative impact.

Summary/Conclusions

- 8.17 It is considered that closing Eccles Leitholm Primary School is the most reasonable option. Council officers have been unable to detect any demand to re-open the school and it is considered that the Educational Benefits of the children attending a larger Primary School are particularly persuasive as the school can offer a fuller curriculum and the modern facilities required to support the pupils' learning journey. Both Coldstream and Swinton Primary Schools have the capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers and are located in the larger community. The closure of Eccles Leitholm Primary School is not considered to have been detrimental to the area and pupil numbers have remained consistent. The school building is seen as an opportunity for the community and several interested parties have already made enquiries. Accordingly this option is considered to be the most appropriate for all the reasons given above.

9 CATCHMENT AREA

- 9.1 Given that over 80% of the children in the Eccles Leitholm catchment are currently choosing to not to attend the school that their catchment was re-zoned to following mothballing, it is considered that a consultation should be carried out with the parents and community to establish which school the preference would be for the re-zoning.

- 9.2 The decision was made to re-zone to Coldstream, at the time of mothballing for a number of reasons. Eccles Leitholm was a partner school with Coldstream Primary School and they had a shared head teacher. Pupils from Eccles Leitholm regularly accessed facilities and activities in Coldstream Primary. The schools were both within the same secondary cluster (Berwickshire) and worked in the same learning community. Improvement plans were aligned across the 2 schools, along with curricular and teaching plans. It was therefore considered by the Council at this time that this would result in an easy transition for pupils from Eccles Leitholm into classes at Coldstream and that their learning continuity and progression would be supported. The catchment area for Eccles Leitholm was therefore rezoned to Coldstream Primary School and transportation was provided for the children to their new school.
- 9.3 However it is clear that parental choice has led to the children from the Eccles Leitholm catchment attending a number of schools across 3 different High School clusters (Berwickshire, Kelso and Earlston). Council officers consider that any catchment re-zoning should remain within its High School cluster as the re-zoning of secondary catchments would be a significant undertaking which would require clear and identifiable Educational Benefits.
- 9.4 It is therefore considered reasonable that the a consultation should be carried out to establish views on which school the catchment area should be re-zoned to. Council officers are satisfied that there would be strong educational benefits attached to both proposals and wish to establish what they views and preferences are within the Eccles Leitholm area before a final proposal is made to Councillors.