

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



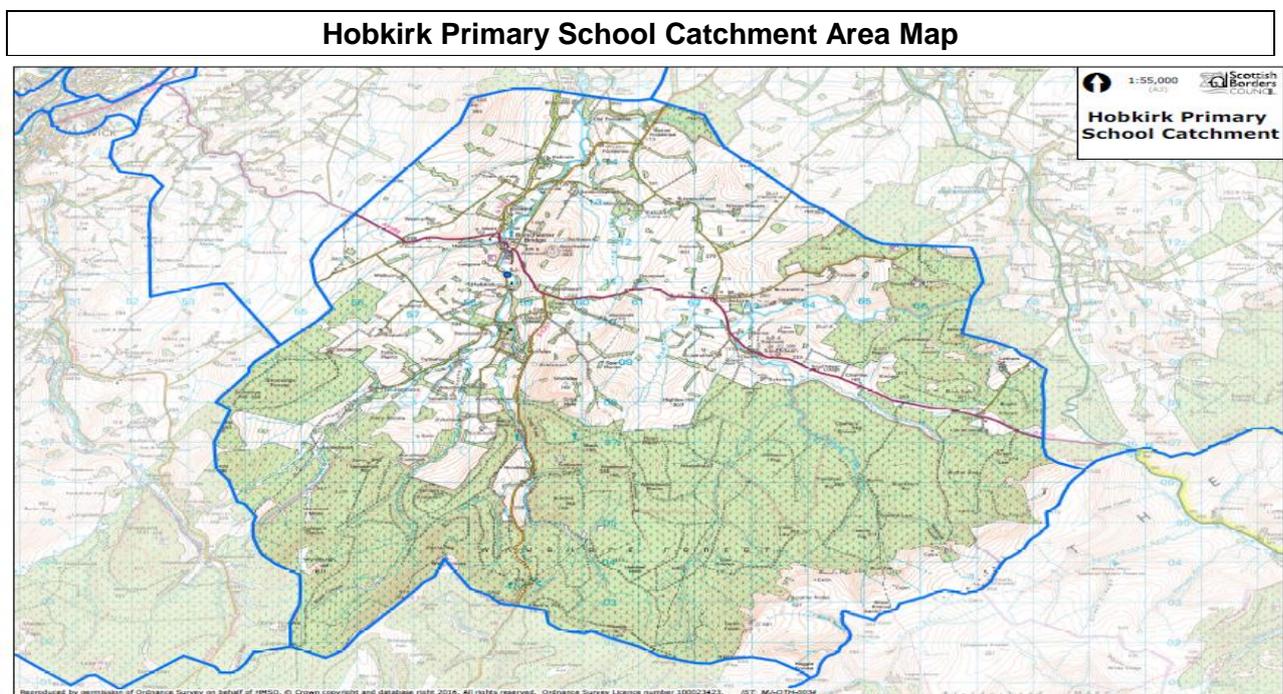
**HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

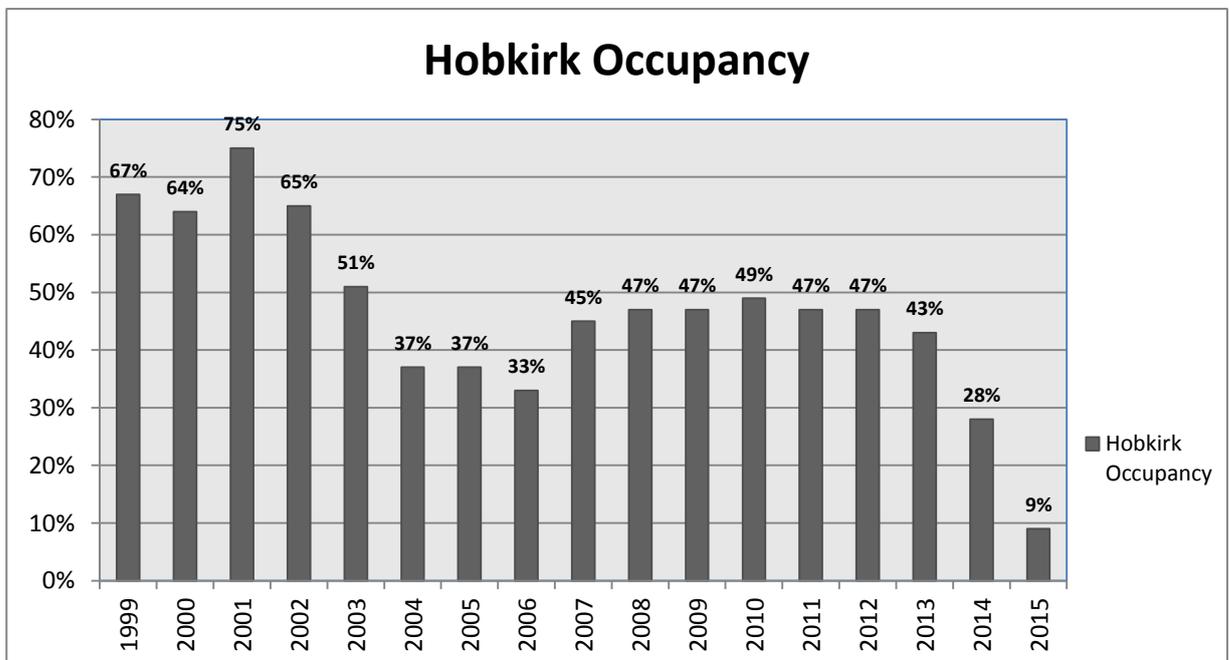
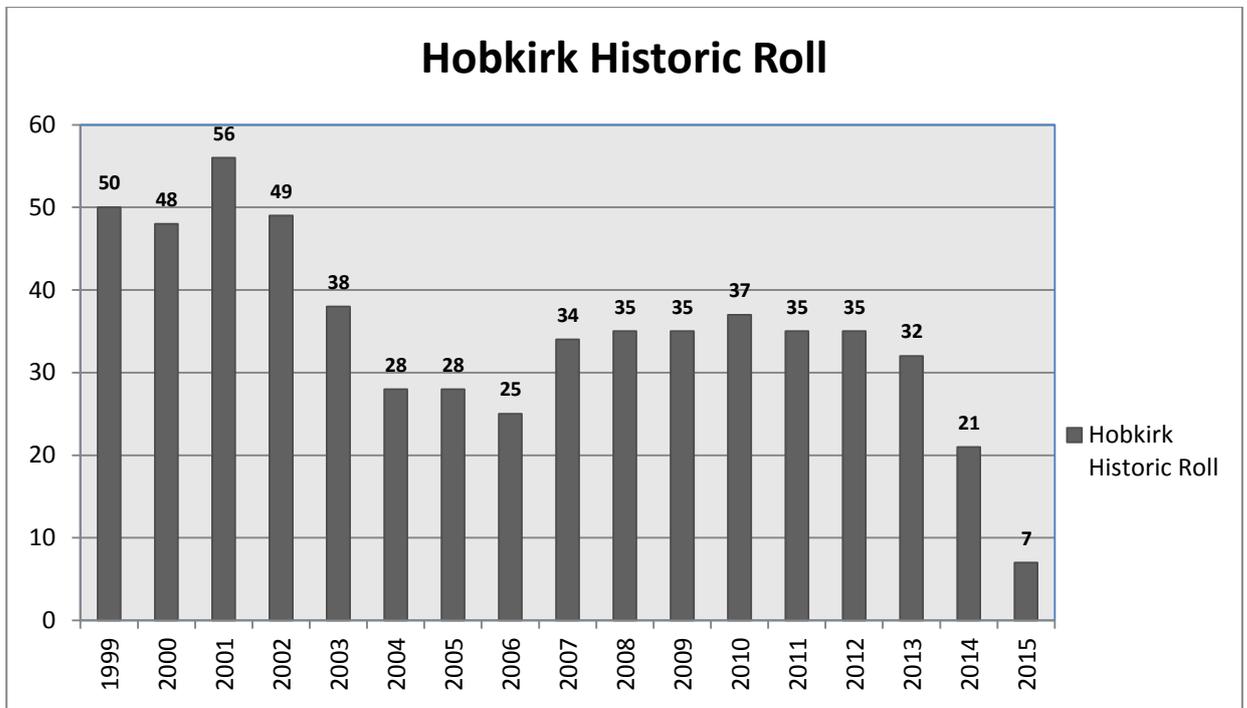
- 1.1 Scottish Borders Council commenced a School Estate Review in 2015 of all the schools across the region, seeking to deliver the maximum educational benefits for all the children and young people in the area. On 7 November 2017, the Council's Executive (Education) Committee approved amended guiding 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 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 considers 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 Hobkirk Primary School, which was mothballed in November 2015.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Hobkirk Primary School is a non-denominational primary school located between Hobkirk and Bonchester Bridge. The school opened in 1936, with capacity for 75 pupils. The school's catchment area is indicated below:



- 2.2 The pupil roll at the school reduced dramatically in the years preceding mothballing - from 56 pupils in 2000/01 to 7 in 2014/15. In January 2010 the roll at Hobkirk Primary comprised 35 pupils (2 composite classes) and a nursery with 4 pupils. However the number of children in the nursery reduced and by August 2012 the nursery was accommodated within the Primary 1-4 class; by August 2013 all pupils were taught in one composite P1-P7 and the nursery ceased to operate as there were no nursery aged children. The profile of the roll since 2000 is detailed below:-



- 2.3 In 2014/15 there were 24 primary aged pupils residing within the Hobkirk catchment area; however 71% of those pupils were enrolled at other schools after submitting placement requests.
- 2.4 No P1 children had enrolled at Hobkirk Primary School since 2013. Consultation in 2015, with the parents of pre-school children within the area, indicated that they intended to submit placement requests for their children to commence P1 at other primary schools in the Hawick schools cluster, at the start of the new school year.
- 2.5 Given the considerable drop in the school roll, Council officers recognised that Hobkirk Primary School was at risk. Discussions were held with the community to consider all the options available regarding the school. Parents expressed that their children had benefitted from and enjoyed their links with Denholm Primary School for ICT and PE. Many children had indicated that they wanted to spend more time at Denholm. Parents identified a number of concerns relating to the size of Hobkirk Primary School and the potential effects 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 games

and team sports and 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.

- 2.6 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 Hobkirk Primary in the 2015/16 session.
- 2.7 In November 2015, Scottish Borders Council Executive agreed that Hobkirk 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.
- 2.8 As the majority of placement requests from the area (65%) were to Denholm Primary School, indicating a parental preference, the catchment for Hobkirk was temporarily rezoned to Denholm. The two schools were already partner schools, sharing a Headteacher, with Hobkirk pupils accessing facilities and activities in Denholm on a regular basis. As the schools are in the same secondary catchment area and worked across the same learning area, transition was straightforward given the alignment in curricular programmes and teaching plans.
- 2.9 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 The demographics of the local population have changed over recent years. The table below, derived from National Records of Scotland census data, shows the age group distribution for the datazone that includes Hobkirk Primary School catchment area and how it has changed between 2001 and 2017. In 2001 there were 157 children (aged 0 to 15) living in this area, which was 20% of the population. However by 2017 there were estimated to be 96 children (aged 0 to 15) living in this area, which is 12% of the population and equates to a 39% reduction in young people over this period.

<b>Bonchester Bridge and Chesters Area (S01012358)</b>			
<b>Date of Census</b>	<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>2001</b>	0 to 15	157	20%
	16 to 64	466	61%
	65+	144	19%
	All people	767	100%
<b>2011</b>	0 to 15	93	12%
	16 to 64	498	65%
	65+	176	23%
	All people	767	100%
<b>2017 – Estimate NRS</b>	0 to 15	96	12%
	16 to 64	437	57%
	65+	235	31%
	All people	768	100%

- 3.2 Council records (based on Early Learning and Primary enrolment forms) indicate that there are currently 8 pre-school aged children (aged 3+) in the Hobkirk catchment area; along with 24 primary aged pupils.
- 3.3 The current Local Development Plan 2016 does not anticipate much development in the area; one housing site within Bonchester Bridge is allocated for development. This site is located opposite the Memorial Hall and has an indicative site capacity of 8 units. No houses have been completed to date. The Housing Land Audit (HLA) 2018 programmes the site as being effective from 2021; with 2 units a year being built over a 4 year period. This has been informed using past completion rates and the level of developer interest to date within the area. It is not anticipated that this development would significantly impact on pupil numbers.

## 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 Hobkirk Primary School namely:

<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Reopen Hobkirk Primary School with its original catchment area</b>
<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Reopen Hobkirk Primary School with an expanded catchment area</b>
<b>Option 3</b>	<b>Continue mothballing Hobkirk Primary School, with the catchment continuing to be zoned to Denholm Primary School</b>
<b>Option 4</b>	<b>Permanently close Hobkirk Primary School, rezoning the catchment area to Denholm Primary School</b>

## 5 OPTION 1

### REOPEN HOBKIRK 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 24 primary pupils in the catchment area. 88% of these pupils currently attend Denholm Primary School with the remaining children attending primary schools in Hawick (8%) and Jedburgh (4%).
- 5.2 Pupil numbers had fallen dramatically before Hobkirk Primary school was mothballed – a fall of 81% in the 5 year period preceding mothballing. It was also evident that immediately prior to mothballing 71% 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 consultation process in 2016 it there was 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 Hobkirk Primary School catchment area would chose return to the school if it were it to reopen.

## **Condition and Suitability**

- 5.4 A condition survey was carried out on the building in 2015 and the overall site is rated as Condition C Poor (Showing major defects and/or not operating adequately). Condition is an assessment of physical condition of the school and its grounds.
- 5.5 The suitability of Hobkirk Primary School prior to mothballing was categories as B (Satisfactory) with elements of C (Poor). Suitability is a more subjective 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.
- 5.6 The backlog maintenance costs are currently estimated to be £229,000. This would remedy the current issues; other costs may be incurred to re-open the building. The facilities at the school would be adequate but there would most likely still require to share facilities with Denholm Primary School for ICT and PE.

## **Educational Benefits**

- 5.7 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 roll may not be able to experience a variety of learning and teaching experience 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.
- 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 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 Hobkirk catchment currently all attend larger schools ranging from c100- 300 pupils 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. This can also reduce the likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wide range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. As was seen, prior to mothballing, the partnership between Hobkirk and Denholm primaries did not boost the roll number at Hobkirk but in fact increased the number of placement requests to Denholm as children wished more access to the facilities at the school.

- A smaller roll and a smaller peer group may result in pupils requiring more support in the transition to secondary school as it may appear more daunting.
- A partner provider currently provides ELC at Denholm primary school. The entitlement of funded provision for 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds within the Denholm school catchment is due to increase from 600 to 1140 hours in 2019. Officers have been unable to identify a demand for to support a viable ELC provision at Hobkirk.

### **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 may 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 Hobkirk Primary School in November 2015, the Council agreed to provide school transportation to all pupils who resided in the Hobkirk catchment area attending Denholm Primary School. These travel arrangements have been in place for over 3 years. There are currently 21 children from the Hobkirk catchment attending Denholm Primary School. The impact for some children is that it has resulted in a longer home to school journey of 25 minutes, 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 Hobkirk Primary School this provision may require to be altered however as has been stated above this may result in longer journeys for some children versus the status quo of currently attending Denholm Primary School. If the decision was taken to re-open the school future pupils in the Hobkirk catchment would no longer be provided funded transport to Denholm but would only be provided transportation to their catchment school, if appropriate.
- 5.10 The distance to Denholm Primary School is generally less for staff and the provision of services from key Council departments is more accessible at Denholm Primary than it was to provide services at Hobkirk Primary School. . If this proposal was to go ahead it would result in an increase in travel times.
- 5.11 It is recognised that adverse weather in the winter currently impacts on travel arrangements in this area. In terms of adverse weather, Hobkirk Primary School would generally be more affected than Denholm Primary School. However there are always likely to be issues in the area because of the rural 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**

- 5.12 At the time of mothballing, the Community in general viewed the mothballing as appropriate. Subsequent interaction with the Community has indicated that they 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 the size of Hobkirk 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.

- 5.13 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.
- 5.14 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 hall at Bonchester Bridge serves 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. The Community view the freeing up of the building through closure of the school as a potential opportunity and the Council has already received approaches in this regard.

### **Financial Impact**

- 5.15 The approximate cost to bring the property into an acceptable condition for reopening is £229,000. It should be noted that there may be potential further costs for further works if the building were to reopen permanently and be used for the long terms. Based on the pupil numbers before mothballing, it is estimated that it would cost c£19,000 per pupil to operate the school. The average in the Borders is c£4,000 per annum.

### **Environmental Impact**

- 5.16 The reduced travel for some of the children to Hobkirk Primary would be cancelled out by the impact of reinstating services and staff having to travel further to access Hobkirk Primary School.
- 5.17 The school building at Hobkirk is dated and would be not only expensive to reinstate but would also be more costly to run. The school at Denholm is modern and more environmentally sustainable than the older Hobkirk building.

### **CONCLUSION:**

- 5.18 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.
- 5.19 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. Prior to Hobkirk mothballing Denholm Primary School also saw a decline in roll where capacity dropped by 22% in the 10 years to 2008 however since the new school was built and (with the additional numbers attending from Hobkirk) the numbers have now increased to 84% occupancy.
- 5.20 Denholm is a modern school with good facilities and with strong educational outcomes and experiences. The facilities offered at Hobkirk, after investment to improve the school to a functional standard, would not be of a similar standard to those at Denholm Primary School. It is considered that while Hobkirk reopening would be likely to allow for greater involvement with the Hobkirk community, the pupils within the Hobkirk catchment are currently benefitting from the facilities and schools in nearby larger towns which have strong links with the wider community. It could be considered that there would be educational disadvantages in reopening Hobkirk Primary School with a small school roll versus the combined provision that is currently provided. The majority of the catchment pupils attend Denholm, which still provides the opportunity for smaller class sizes as the school comprises 5 composite classes which cannot exceed 25 pupils. Many of the educational benefits considered to arise from attending a smaller rural school also apply to Denholm, 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 Hobkirk.
- 5.21 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 Hobkirk Primary School with its original catchment zone.

## 6 **OPTION 2**

### **REOPEN HOBKIRK 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 Hobkirk could be made more sustainable by extending it into one or more of the neighbouring catchment areas of Denholm, Newcastleton and Howdenburn Primary Schools. Denholm and Newcastleton catchment areas are rural areas and because of the geography, options in relation to safe travel are limited. Whereas Howdenburn's catchment area covers part of Jedburgh and adjacent rural areas. The summary of the findings is as follows:

- Denholm Primary School currently has 105 pupils which equates to 84% occupancy of the school. Many of the pupils attending the school live relatively close to the village (c40%). 20% of the pupils attending Denholm reside in the former Hobkirk catchment zone. This mapping exercise has confirmed that the pupils living close to the boundary of Hobkirk and Denholm's catchment areas live closer to Denholm Primary School. It is considered that it would be unlikely that a choice would be made to attend Hobkirk which is further away and with lesser facilities.
- Newcastleton Primary School currently has 68 pupils which equates to 68% of capacity within the school. 87% of pupils attending the school live in Newcastleton or close by. Given the rural nature of Newcastleton's catchment and the terrain it is not considered that there are any pupils living closer to Hobkirk than Newcastleton so it is considered that there would not be support for a catchment change.
- Howdenburn Primary School Community currently has 145 pupils which equates to 53% of capacity. 73% of the pupils live in Jedburgh and of those that live in more rural locations; it is not considered that any of the pupils would have a shorter or quicker journey to Hobkirk Primary School and that it would be unlikely for them to choose to attend Hobkirk in preference to Howdenburn or the new intergenerational learning campus currently under construction. Howdenburn Primary School is to be replaced in March 2020 when all primary and secondary education within the town of Jedburgh will be relocated to the Jedburgh Intergenerational Learning Campus (still to be named).

6.3 From our analysis of the postcodes of the school aged children it is not considered likely that there would be demand for spaces at a re-opened Hobkirk Primary School. All the pupils that reside near the Hobkirk catchment boundary currently have shorter and quicker journeys to their 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 Hobkirk's catchment area.

#### **Educational Benefits**

6.4 In order to change an catchment area a statutory consultation would be required in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. 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 considered that a proposal to amend the catchment zones of

Denholm and/or Newcastleton Primary School is unlikely to receive support from those communities.

- 6.5 As was identified in **Option 1** that the re-opening of Hobkirk would be likely to allow for greater involvement with the Hobkirk community the children there are few other compelling educational reasons to change the current catchment zones.

#### **Educational Benefits and Impacts on Staff**

- 6.6 These will be the same as **Option 1**, with potential for increased pupil transport costs depending on the number of children affected.

#### **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 Hobkirk/Bonchester Bridge. 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 Hobkirk Primary School.

#### **Financial Impact**

- 6.9 As in **Option 1**.

#### **Environmental Impact**

- 6.10 The reduced travel for some of the children to Hobkirk Primary would be cancelled out by the impact:-
- 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 Hobkirk 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 either in the Denholm or Newcastleton or in a close vicinity. 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 Hobkirk has been identified and there appears to be satisfaction with the current primary schools attended. Accordingly the option to amend/extend the Hobkirk catchment area is not considered a reasonable option.

## 7 OPTION 3

### CONTINUE MOTHBALLING HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH THE PUPILS ZONED TO DENHOLM 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, Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, 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 only 8 new homes projected to be built in the area and their impact is not considerable significant to projected figures.

#### **Community Impact**

- 7.3 There was a significant view at the community meetings 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 bought over by 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 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

### **CLOSE HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL ZONING ANY PUPILS TO DENHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE PERMANENT RE-DELINEATION OF THE CATCHMENT ZONE**

- 8.1 Option 4 would formalise the status quo; resulting in the permanent closure of the school and the permanent re-delineation of the catchment zone. This would allow Children and Young People to declare the school building as surplus and alternative uses for the building could then be progressed.
- 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

#### **Case for Closure**

- 8.3 Hobkirk Primary School was mothballed in November 2015 after a rapid decline in the school roll (80% reduction 2011 - 2015) and an increase in placement requests (17% in 2011 increasing to 74% at the start of 2015) with the majority of pupils attending Denholm Primary School (69%). In 2018/19 there 24 primary school aged children residing in the catchment area for Hobkirk Primary School with 83% attending Denholm. Council officers have identified no demand for the school to be re-opened and has been advised that the community already considers the school is closed.
- 8.4 Denholm Primary School has a capacity for 125 pupils. The current roll is 105; including 21 pupils from Hobkirk Primary School catchment area (20% of total pupils). It is projected that Denholm Primary School will continue to have capacity to accommodate all pupils from the Hobkirk area. The current occupancy rate for Denholm Primary School including current pupils from Hobkirk Primary School catchment area is 84%.
- 8.5 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 Hobkirk Primary school catchment area that would be likely to generate demand for the school to re-open.

#### **Educational Benefits - Impact on Pupils**

- 8.6 The Educational Benefits of retaining the current catchment area are:
- 8.6.1 Pupils are and will 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.
- 8.6.2 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.
- 8.6.3 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.
- 8.6.4 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.

8.6.5 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.

8.6.6 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.

8.6.7 There is a partner provider providing Early Learning and Childcare setting at the school. From August 2019 all 3-4 year olds and eligible 2 year old, within the Denholm catchment will be entitled to up to 1140 hours funded childcare. This will allow the children to be integrated into the school and will ease the transition to primary school.

### **Educational Benefits - Impact on staff**

8.7 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. Hobkirk 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**

8.8 The closure of Hobkirk 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.

8.9 Denholm Primary School is in the heart of a vibrant village and provides a gathering place for families and communities. More children being located within Denholm Primary will bring a greater sense of community to the area and bring support to parents and remove feelings of isolation and vulnerability. The community will benefit from greater support.

### **Rural Factors – Impact from Travel Arrangements**

8.10 Pupils in the Hobkirk catchment area currently travel times on average of between 20 and 25 minutes miles to Denholm Primary School (location centre). This is not an unreasonable distance to expect children to travel for primary school education in rural areas. Other catchment areas in Scottish Borders also have such a travel distance within them.

8.11 Following the decision to mothball Hobkirk Primary School in November 2015 the Council agreed to provide school transportation to all pupils who resided in the Hobkirk catchment area who were attending Denholm Primary School through placing requests. school transportation. These travel arrangements have been in place for over 3 years. For some children is that it has resulted in a longer home to school journey of 25 minutes, while for others it has shortened the journey.

8.12 Services from key Council departments are more accessible at Denholm Primary School than Hobkirk.

### **Rural Factors - Community Impact**

8.13 The Council has considered the impact upon the community and has held meetings with the community and the Community Council to discuss the 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.

- 8.14 The local Community Council has indicated that it is actively investigating options to acquire the building and the opportunities that will arise from the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. 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**

- 8.15 The savings for closing the school would be minimal as the school is currently mothballed. It is envisaged that should this closure proposal be approved, the Children and Young People's Services Directorate would then declare the building surplus to requirements and thereafter the Place Department of the Council will make recommendations on its future use or disposal in line with Council policy. There would be a discussion with the community the possibility and implications of a community asset transfer.

### **Environmental Impact**

- 8.16 The additional travel of children to Denholm Primary is cancelled out by the reduction of services and visiting staff travelling to Hobkirk Primary School. Denholm Primary School has been designed to a high standard to be a modern more sustainable building and will be cheaper and easier to maintain and run.

### **Summary/Conclusions**

- 8.17 It is considered that closing Hobkirk 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 Denholm Primary School are particularly persuasive as the school can offer a fuller curriculum and the modern facilities required to support the pupils' learning journey. Denholm Primary has capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers in a school building that offers modern facilities to support the curriculum for excellence but is also more sustainable in terms of capacity and environmental impact. The closure of Hobkirk 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 to the Community Council and Scottish Borders Council. Accordingly this option is considered to be the most appropriate.