



**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES**

**CONSULTATION REPORT**

**PROPOSED CLOSURE OF HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL**



**Please share your views on the proposals or any alternative suggestions by 12 July 2019 at:-**

Hobkirk Primary School Consultation  
Children and Young People's Services  
Scottish Borders Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA; or

Email Address: [schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk); or

Online: <https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirkconsultation>

*This Consultation Report has been issued by Scottish Borders Council's Children and Young People's Services in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.*

## SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS FOR THIS CONSULTATION REPORT

### Introduction

- 1.1 This Consultation Report has been issued as part of a statutory consultation process required in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended (**2010 Act**). The 2010 Act sets out the consultation process that local authorities must follow when proposing a permanent change to any of their schools – such as a closure, relocation or change of catchment area.
- 1.2 The 2010 Act also sets out the process, duties and considerations that a Council must comply with when considering the closure of a rural school. Hobkirk Primary School is defined as an Accessible Rural School in accordance with the Scottish Government's Rural School List May 2017<sup>1</sup>.
- 1.3 This consultation has been undertaken following a decision by Scottish Borders Council's Executive Committee on 7 November 2017 to progress the consultation process in respect Hobkirk Primary School. An options appraisal was carried out, in accordance with the 2010 Act, regarding Hobkirk Primary School, which was mothballed in 2015. The Options Appraisal considered all reasonable options regarding the future of the school and concluded that closure was the most reasonable option.
- 1.4 This Consultation Report, in conjunction with the Proposal Paper and Options Appraisal (both attached as **Appendix 1**) details the Council's compliance with the terms of the 2010 Act.

### Proposal Paper

- 1.5 A Proposal Paper detailing the proposals and the Council's reasons for making the proposals was published on 7 March 2019. A copy of the Options Appraisal that had been undertaken by Council officers prior to making the closure proposal was included as an appendix to Proposal Paper. The Options Appraisal considers, in detail, all reasonable alternatives to closure.
- 1.6 A copy of the Proposal Paper was made available free of charge in these locations: –
  - Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA
  - William Laidlaw Memorial Hall, Bonchester Bridge, TD9 8JR
  - Denholm Primary School, Denholm, Hawick, TD9 8LZ
  - Jedburgh Grammar School, Jedburgh, TD8 6DQ
  - Hawick High School, Hawick, TD9 0EG
  - Hawick Library, North Bridge Street, Hawick TD9 9QT

and published on the Scottish Borders Council website:

<https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirk>

### Advertising of the Consultation Process

- 1.7 The publication of the Proposal Paper was advertised in Southern Reporter, on the week commencing 11 March 2019, providing the dates for the consultation period and the public meeting. There were also press releases made and social media postings at the start of the consultation process, before the public meeting and before the end of the consultation period.

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<sup>1</sup> [Scottish Government Rural School List](#)

- 1.8 Formal notice of the proposal was sent by Letter or email to:
- the parents/carers of the children within the Hobkirk catchment area and all children who attend Denholm Primary School, Jedburgh Grammar School and Hawick High School;
  - the Parent Councils of the affected schools;
  - the parent/carers of any children likely to attend Hobkirk Primary School and Denholm Primary School or any affected school within two years of the date of the publication of the Proposal Paper;
  - any Trade Union which is representative of the staff;
  - the staff (teaching and non-teaching) at the affected schools;
  - the Community Councils of Hobkirk, Denholm & District, Newcastleton, Jedburgh and Hawick
  - Community Planning Partnership named partners;
  - the constituency Member of the Scottish Parliament;
  - the constituency Member of Parliament;
  - the List Members of the Scottish Parliament.

### **Length of Consultation period**

- 1.9 The consultation for the proposal ran from 7 March 2019 and ended on 2 May 2019 (both dates inclusive). This period allowed for the statutory minimum of 30 school days. There were 5 responses received in respect of this statutory consultation both on line and in writing. The responses are summarized and responded to in **Section 4** below.

### **Public meetings**

- 1.10 A public meeting was held on:

**16 April 2019 at 7pm at William Laidlaw Memorial Hall, Bonchester Bridge (8 members of the community attended)**

Minutes were taken at the meeting and views were sought following a presentation being given. Copies of the meeting notes are included as **Appendix 2** (which includes a copy of the presentation).

### **Meetings with Pupils and Staff**

- 1.11 Meetings were held with pupils from the former Hobkirk catchment area, now attending Denholm Primary School and staff at Denholm Primary School who had formerly worked at Hobkirk. A summary of these discussions is in **Section 3**.

### **Involvement of Education Scotland**

- 1.12 Education Scotland was notified in advance of this Statutory Consultation process being approved. On completion of the Statutory Consultation period, a copy of the Proposal Paper was sent by Scottish Borders Council to Education Scotland. Education Scotland also received a copy of all relevant additional materials, minutes of public meeting, a summary of the written representations and replies received by the Council during the consultation period.
- 1.13 Education Scotland has prepared a report on the educational aspects of the Proposal, based on the representations and documents mentioned above as well as their interviews with pupils, parents, staff, and associated schools. In preparing their report, Education Scotland visited the

affected schools and reasonable enquiries as they considered appropriate. Their report can be found at **Appendix 3** and also on the Education Scotland Website [Education Scotland Consultation Reports](#). Education Scotland state in their report that the proposal to close Hobkirk Primary School is of potential educational benefit. The report also states that the Council have reasonably concluded that re-opening Hobkirk Primary School is not a viable alternative.

- 1.14 The Issues raised in the Education Scotland Report with regards to Hobkirk Primary School being permanently closed and the catchment being rezoned to Denholm Primary School and the Council's responses are set out in **Section 5** of this Consultation Report.

### **Preparation of Public Consultation Report**

- 1.15 Council officers have reviewed the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, the discussions from the public meeting, comments from pupils and staff and all the responses received during the consultation period. This Consultation Report has been prepared by Scottish Borders Council Children and Young People's Services team as a result. This report will be published in electronic and printed formats. It will be available on the Council web-site and from Council Headquarters, public libraries in the vicinity of the affected schools, as well as the affected schools and the William Laidlaw Memorial Hall in Bonchester Bridge, free of charge. Anyone who made written representations during the consultation period will also be informed about the report.

## **BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Hobkirk Primary School was mothballed by Scottish Borders Council in 2015, following a sustained and dramatic fall in the school roll, with the catchment area being temporarily rezoned to Denholm Primary School.
- 2.2 In February 2016 the Council's Executive (Education) Committee agreed to commence a School Estate Review process regarding the current school estate provision and what it should aspire to look like. As part of the Review, the Council was required to consider schools that had been mothballed and what should happen with them. In November 2017 the decision was made by the Executive Committee to progress to the next stage of the consultation process in respect of the mothballed schools.
- 2.3 As Hobkirk Primary School is deemed an Accessible Rural School in terms of the 2010 Act, the Council is required to have special regard to a number of factors before formulating a proposal for closure. Accordingly the Council considered all reasonable alternative options to closure of the School and a copy of the Options Appraisal is attached in the Proposal Paper (**Appendix 1**).
- 2.4 The Options Appraisal considered:-
- the educational benefits of all the options;
  - pupil projections;
  - demographics of the area;
  - the level of proposed development in the area;
  - opportunities for catchment area amendments;
  - impact on the rural community and the role of the school in the community;
  - Safe Routes to School and travel arrangements;
  - impact on pupils in the catchment area;
  - impact on staff;
  - impact on pupils in other schools in the area;
  - rural impact of proposals;
  - financial impact of proposals; and

- impact on the environment.

- 2.5 The Options Appraisal concluded that closure of the school was the most reasonable option and accordingly a Proposal Paper was prepared detailing the closure proposal, with the catchment area being permanently rezoned to Denholm Primary School. A statutory consultation process commenced on 7 March 2019.
- 2.6 The detailed reasoning for this proposal is set out in the attached Proposal Paper. The Proposal Paper states that there are positive Educational Benefits for current and future pupils within the Hobkirk Primary School catchment area and for the staff of the schools within the area. The Proposal Paper also considers the impact of the proposed closure on the Community.

## **PUPILS AND STAFF – HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL**

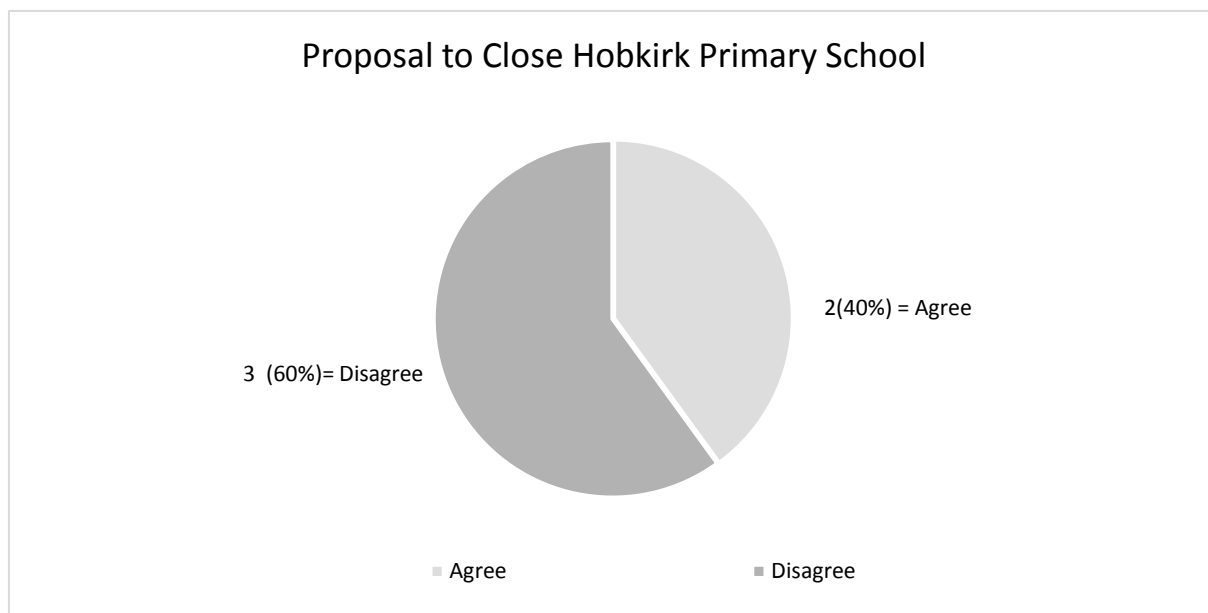
- 3.1 Discussions were held with a group of pupils at Denholm Primary School from the Hobkirk catchment area (considered to be of a suitable age and maturity) and staff who had previously worked at Hobkirk.
- 3.2 Key points raised at these discussions with pupils were:
- Pupils all enjoy their learning experiences and opportunities at Denholm;
  - The pupils enjoy having a larger peer group and enjoyed mixing with pupils across the age groups in the school;
  - The pupils who live in Bonchester Bridge all said they would prefer to be able to walk to school and thought that the playpark was better in Bonchester Bridge;
  - Pupils that had attended Hobkirk said they would rather come to Denholm as they enjoy the facilities and having a larger friendship group;
  - The pupils with the longer journeys are quite happy with the journey times and arrangements;
  - There were discussions about the mix of children at a smaller school and some pupils considered that they wouldn't want to go if there wasn't a good balance in the numbers of boys and girls;
  - One pupil thought Denholm was a bit small;
  - Most of the pupils would not like to attend a school with only 1 class, although a couple thought that might be good;
  - Overall the pupils are very happy with their current school and enjoy going to school at Denholm.
- 3.3 The key point from the discussions with 2 former member of staff from Hobkirk were:-
- The staff members were sad and disappointed about the proposal to close the school, they were very fond of the school and had great memories of being pupils, parents and staff at the school;
  - While there was a great deal of pride about the school, both staff members considered that closure was probably inevitable as the demographics of the area had changed and parents had made choices to send their children to other schools;.
  - The staff were very positive about the learning experiences and opportunities that the children had at Denholm.

## RESPONSES

- 4.1 There were 5 responses made during the consultation period in respect of the proposals. The key points raised within the written representations regarding the proposed closure of Hobkirk Primary School were:-

### Do you agree with the proposal to permanently close Hobkirk Primary School?

5 responses were received.

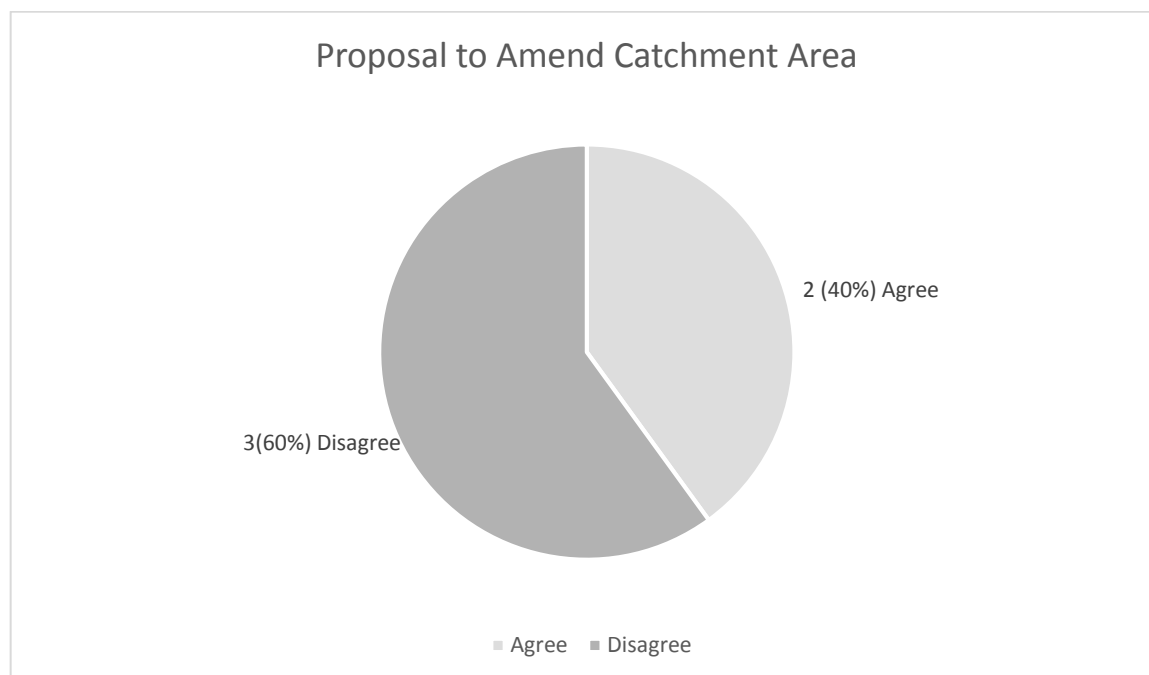


Questionnaire Comments	Council Responses
<i>The school day has increased significantly with the travel time. There are now more children living in the area.</i>	Noted. The re-zoning of the catchment area has resulted in longer journeys for some of the children, This has been discussed with the children who do not consider it unreasonable. The longest journey is estimated to be c30 minutes each way and is not considered unreasonable, with several children travelling similar distances across the Borders area. The number of children in the area has been fairly constant since the school has closed. Government figures estimate that the area has seen a 39% in reduction of under 16s between 2001 and 2017. We have been unable to identify any demand from parents in the area to re-open the school.
<i>One teacher who was not good at her job and disliked by pupils and parents has caused this sad state of affairs. Why was this teacher not removed?</i>	Noted. Parents have advised Council officers that many of the children wished to move to Denholm after attending the school for

<i>Parents dissatisfied then relocated their children, hence the fall in numbers.</i>	subjects such as ICT and PE. Evidence across the region indicates that a school roll often falls dramatically when it drops to 1 composite class.
<i>Dwindling numbers were the main cause</i>	Noted and agreed. The school had seen a rapid decline in roll prior to mothballing, with a large number of pupils enrolling at Denholm Primary School. Prior to mothballing 71% of catchment pupils were attending another school with no P1 pupils enrolling at the school since 2013.

**Do you agree with the proposal to permanently re-zone Hobkirk Primary School's catchment area (if the school is to close) to Denholm Primary School?**

There were 5 responses



Response Comments	Council Response
<i>Denholm school is becoming overcrowded with pupils and the class sizes are too large. If Hobkirk is reopened it would allow the classes to be more manageable and allow teachers spend more time with individual students</i>	Denholm currently has 105 pupils, with capacity for 125 pupils. There are 5 composite classes. The Scottish Government require that composite classes cannot have more than 25 pupils. The school is not considered to be overcrowded. The facilities at Denholm are excellent and when Council officers met with the children, the children

	all confirmed that they are happy with the learning opportunities and experiences at Denholm.
<i>So Denholm has to bear the brunt of BRC's inability to address the real problem, resulting in overcrowded classes and far less individual attention</i>	Denholm is currently operating at 84% capacity. There are 21 children from the former Hobkirk catchment area attending Denholm. There is capacity at the school for another 20 children. Current projections indicate that the roll at the school will continue at a similar level for the next 5 years. Class sizes are set by Government and composite classes cannot exceed 25. Prior to the mothballing Hobkirk parents from the Hobkirk had begun to make placement requests and there had been no P1s enrolling at the school for 3 years. The placement requests were being made prior to the school dropping to a single composite class. Parents have a legal right to make placement requests and there are very limited grounds for a Council to refuse a placement request.
<i>As long as free transport is provided to those currently living in the Hobkirk catchment area and the Denholm primary school is guaranteed to stay open, with the correct level of funding.</i>	The current transport arrangements will continue with all children living more than 2.5 miles from the school receiving transport to school. Denholm is a thriving school which the children enjoy attending, and is active within the community. Pupil numbers have been relatively stable and have grown since the school was re-opened in 2008, following the fire. There are no concerns within SBC about the sustainability of Denholm Primary School
<i>The Church of Hobkirk &amp; Southdean is linked with Ruberslaw (Bedrule, Denholm &amp; Minto) and we share the minister who lived in the manse just along from the school where the minister is welcome</i>	Noted. It is hoped that making the current catchment area a permanent arrangement will help strengthen the existing links across the wider community.

**One of the alternative proposals that Council officers considered was the re-opening of Hobkirk Primary School. Please tell us if you have any comments or suggestions regarding this option.**

<b>Response Comments</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<i>As a past pupil from 1979 to 1986 I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of being a country child in a small local school. I still feel the grounding and feeling of</i>	Noted. Council officers have spoken to several parents and members of staff who have all shared stories about the school and have spoken with great fondness and pride about the school.



<i>security and safety that Hobkirk Primary School gave me has made me who I am now at 44.</i>	
<b>GET A DECENT TEACHER</b>	Noted.
<i>If there were the numbers to warrant re-opening Hobkirk I think that would be a boost to the community however unless there are sufficient numbers of children attending I do not think it would benefit those attending.</i>	Noted. Council officers have not been able to identify any demand from parents to re-open the school
<i>Not a good idea. Not enough children.</i>	Noted and agreed. Council officers have been unable to identify any demand from parents to re-open the school

**One of the options that Council officers considered was to reopen Hobkirk Primary School with an extended catchment area. Please tell us if you have any comments or suggestions regarding this option.**

<b>Response Comments</b>	<b>Council Response</b>
<i>I believe that a larger catchment area would be a positive step only if the teacher ratio was correct.</i>	Noted. Unfortunately officers have carried out a detailed analysis of postcodes of children residing in neighbouring catchments and were unable to identify any children living nearer to Hobkirk than their existing catchment school. Furthermore there has been no demand from parents to re-open the school.  Teacher numbers are set in accordance with class sizes which are stipulated by Scottish Government Regulations.
<i>Yes, I agree with this option as it offers more freedom for families outwith the previous catchment area to enjoy the small country school start to their kids' education too</i>	Please see above response regarding catchment areas.
<i>Good idea.</i>	Please see above response regarding catchment areas.
<i>Would this not detract from existing primary schools - do not see this as a solution.</i>	Noted and agreed. Please see above response regarding catchment areas.
<i>Not a good idea</i>	Noted

One of the options that Council officers considered was to continue mothballing Hobkirk Primary School. Please tell us if you have any comments or suggestions regarding this option.

Response Comments	Council Response
<i>Hobkirk school was an integral part of the community and served the children well with many head boys and girls at Hawick and Jedburgh schools. This school should not be mothballed but operating as a functional school.</i>	Noted. Unfortunately Council officers have been unable to identify any demand from parents to re-open the school.
<i>If mothballed indefinitely then the building will deteriorate beyond salvation. Decisions must be made now.</i>	Noted and agreed.
<i>Hang your heads in shame BRC</i>	Noted.
<i>I do not wish to see the building left empty for many years to come whilst slowly turning into a ruin and an eyesore.</i>	Noted and agreed,
<i>A waste of money</i>	Noted. SBC officers do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of resources as there does not appear to be a demand amongst parents for the school to be re-opened.

Please tell us if you have any further comments or alternative suggestions regarding the proposals

Response Comments	Council Response
<i>The only reason that I can see that the school was mothballed is purely financial on Scottish Borders Council educational book keeping department.</i>	Noted. The school was mothballed for educational reasons following a sustained drop in roll as parents were choosing to send their children to other schools, as they are entitled to do so in terms of the Education Act 1980. Council officers believe that when the roll drops to such a low level that for education and social reasons, the children can receive better experiences and opportunities at a larger school.
<i>All four of my girls were educated at Hobkirk. A happy foundation that saw them flourish and go on to Jed Grammar.</i>	Noted.
<i>I think closure is inevitable</i>	Noted.

## 5 EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT

- 5.1 In line with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, a report was provided by Education Scotland on the educational aspects of the proposal. Education Scotland's report is attached as **Appendix 3**
- 5.2 Issues raised and comments made in the Education Scotland Report with regards to the proposed closure of Hobkirk Primary School are set out below:

<b>Education Scotland Comments</b>	<b>Council Responses</b>
<i>Parents, children and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors were in agreement with the Council's proposal.</i>	Noted and agreed – this reflects the opinions shared with Council officers before and during the consultation process.
<i>Whilst they regretted the loss of a small rural school, they could see no reasonable alternative to its permanent closure.</i>	Noted and agreed. The decision taken to make a proposal to close a school is never taken lightly, however after analysing the alternatives, Council officers have concluded closure is the most reasonable option.
<i>Children valued their learning experiences and other opportunities at Denholm. They enjoyed their learning with their peers and spoke enthusiastically about the learning environment and facilities available at Denholm. Those who had attended Hobkirk Primary School in the past, spoke favourably about the better opportunities available at Denholm</i>	Noted and agreed. This reflects the discussions Council officers have had with the children attending Denholm Primary School who were very positive about their school, even the travel to and from school.
<i>Children wondered what might happen to the Hobkirk Primary School building should the Council implement its proposal and expressed a desire to be part of the discussions the Council has undertaken to hold with the community. The Council will need to consider this in its final report.</i>	Noted. If the school is closed, SBC Estates team will continue their engagement with the local community and the Community Council. The history of the school will be treated with care and archives will be made with the trophies and photographs etc. being transferred to Denholm where they will be held for safe keeping.
<i>The Council considered an option to reopen Hobkirk Primary School with its existing catchment, on the basis of lack of community demand and projected pupil number, reasonably concluded that this was not a viable alternative.</i>	Noted and agreed.

<i>There is limited use of the school building by the local community groups, since a village hall is available for community meeting and activities. Stakeholders, including children, have expressed concerns about the future of the empty school building and what will happen to items of significance to the local community such as sporting trophies and photographs. The Council will need to consider this in its final paper.</i>	Noted. If the school is closed, SBC Estates team will continue their engagement with the local community and the Community Council. The history of the school will be treated with care and archives will be made with the trophies and photographs etc. being transferred to Denholm where they will be held for safe keeping.
<i>Overall, the impact of different travel arrangements resulting from the Council's proposal is modest</i>	Noted and agreed.
<i>The Scottish Borders Council's proposal to permanently close Hobkirk Primary School and rezone its catchment area to Denholm Primary School is of potential educational benefit. It will formalise an arrangement that has been in place since Hobkirk Primary School was mothballed in 2015. Children would benefit from a potentially broader range of learning experiences including better opportunities to learn and socialise with their peers. The council will need to outline how it will continue to engage with the local community on the future of the school building and on the preservation of relevant school artefacts in its final report.</i>	Noted. If the school is to be closed, following completion of the consultation process, SBC Estates team will assume responsibility for the building. There have already been several discussions regarding the building and future plans that members of the community may have for the building or the site. The school artefacts from Hobkirk will be archived and then transferred to Denholm Primary School for safe keeping.

## INACCURACY IN THE PROPOSAL PAPER

- There have been no material errors, omissions or inaccuracies identified in the Proposal Paper or any of the other documentation that has been published as part of the Consultation process.

## CONSULTATION REPORT NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 This Consultation Report will be published at on 19 June 2019 and is available for further consideration for a period of three weeks from that date, until 12 July 2019. **The intention is that interested parties should have time to consider the Consultation Report and if they so wish, to raise concerns and pose alternative solutions by making written or electronic submissions to:**

Hobkirk Primary School Consultation  
Children and Young People's Services  
Scottish Borders Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA; or

Email Address: [schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk)

Consultation Site:  
<https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirkconsultation>

If you wish to respond by letter or electronically, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil”, “parent”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in school”, “member of the community” etc. Responses from Parent Councils, Staff and Pupil Councils are particularly welcome.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically, should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Scottish Borders Council”. Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available.

For any written or electronic response to be considered it must be received by the Council no later than the last day of the consultation period, 12 July 2019.

## Decision

- 7.2 This report together with all other relevant documentation will be considered by Scottish Borders Council who will be asked to make a decision at the full Council meeting on 29 August 2019.

## Distribution

- 7.3 A copy of the Consultation Report will be made available free of charge for public consultation from **19 June 2019 to 12 July 2019** in these locations –

- Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA
- William Laidlaw Memorial Hall, Bonchester Bridge, TD9 8JR
- Denholm Primary School, Denholm, Hawick, TD9 8LZ
- Jedburgh Grammar School, Jedburgh, TD8 6DQ
- Hawick High School, Hawick, TD9 0EG
- Hawick Library, North Bridge Street, Hawick, TD9 9QT

and published on the Scottish Borders Council website:

<https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirkconsultation>

## **SCOTTISH MINISTERS CALL-IN**

- 8.1 If Scottish Borders Council, as the Education Authority, makes a final decision to implement the proposal, it will notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision, and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. This must be done within 6 working days of that decision. The Education Authority must also publish on its website the fact that it has notified Scottish Ministers of its decision and of the period during which consultees have the opportunity to make representations to Ministers. For rural school closures, such as this, the Education Authority must also give notice of the reasons why the Council is satisfied that closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for bringing forward the proposal.
- 8.2 The Scottish Ministers have an 8 week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in the proposal. During the first three weeks of this period, anyone is able to make representations to Ministers on whether the decision should be called-in. Within the first 3 weeks of that 8 week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the 8 week call-in process is known, the Authority cannot proceed to implement the proposal. Ministers may come to a decision sooner than eight weeks (but not before the three weeks for representations to be made to them has elapsed).
- 8.3 If Scottish Ministers decide to call in a closure proposal, they must refer it to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels for determination by a School Closure Review Panel. Scottish Borders Council as the Education Authority may not implement the proposal (wholly or partly) unless the Panel has granted consent to it (with or without conditions) and either the period for making an appeal to the Sheriff has expired or, if an appeal has been made, it has either been abandoned or the Sheriff has confirmed the Panel's decision.
- 8.4 The School Closure Review Panel may refuse to consent to the proposal, refuse consent and remit the proposal back to Scottish Borders Council as the Education Authority or grant their consent to the proposal subject to conditions or unconditionally.
- 8.5 The Act, as amended, gives Ministers and School Closure Review Panels the right to call on advice from Education Scotland in relation to a proposal at the call-in or determination stage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- 9.1 Scottish Borders Council would like to thank all the members of the Community that have participated in this consultation process and also invite them to make any further comments, observations or suggestions regarding the proposals prior to the final decision is made by the Councillors on 29 August.
- 9.2 Please take this opportunity to have your say and share your comments at:-

Hobkirk Primary School Consultation  
Children and Young People's Services  
Scottish Borders Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA; or

Email Address: [schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk)

Consultation Site:

<https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirkconsultation>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Easingwood', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Stuart Easingwood**

Interim Service Director, Children & Young People's Services

19 June 2019



**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES  
STATUTORY CONSULTATION  
PROPOSED CLOSURE OF HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL**



**CONSULTATION PERIOD**  
**FROM 7 MARCH 2019 TO 2 MAY 2019**

**PUBLIC MEETING**  
**AT WILLIAM LAIDLAW MEMORIAL HALL, BONCHESTER BRIDGE  
ON 16 APRIL 2019 AT 7.00PM**



## THE PROPOSALS

1 It is proposed, subject to the outcome of this statutory consultation, that:-

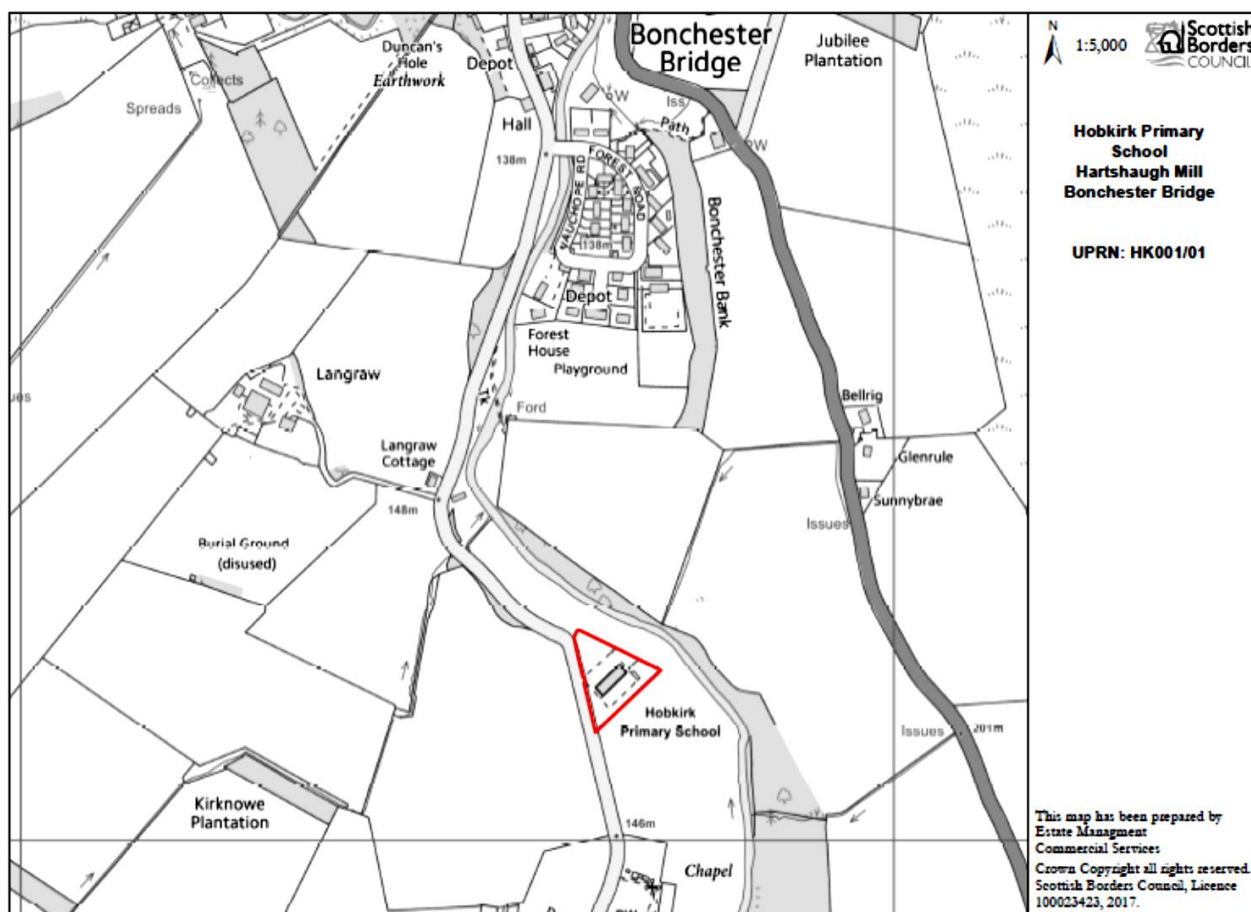
- Hobkirk Primary School (currently mothballed) is permanently closed on or around 20 August 2019; and
- If Hobkirk Primary School is closed, that its catchment area is permanently rezoned to the catchment area for Denholm Primary School (the **Proposals**).

## BACKGROUND

### 2 Hobkirk Primary School

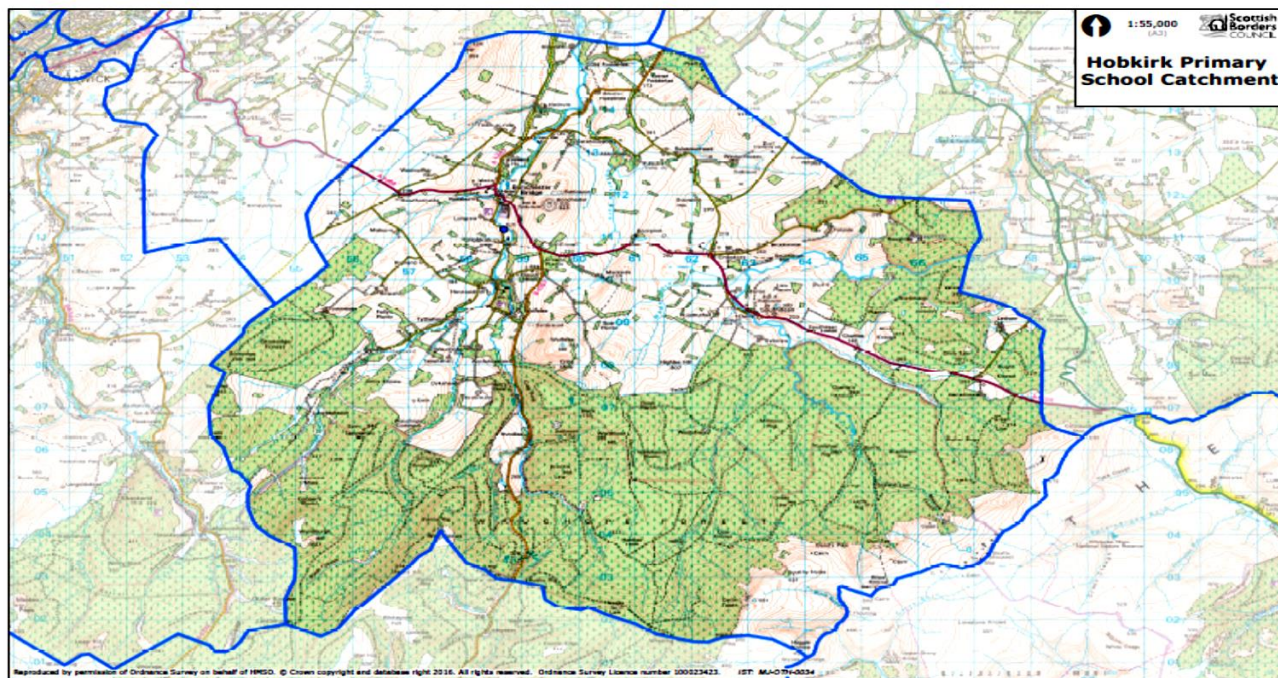
2.1 Hobkirk Primary School is a non-denominational primary school, with capacity for 75 pupils. Its catchment area serves the villages of Hobkirk, Bonchester Bridge and the surrounding area within Teviot and Liddesdale. The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2017<sup>2</sup> classifies Hobkirk as "Accessible-rural" which is an area with a population of less than 3,000 people, and within a 30 minute drive time of a settlement of 10,000 or more.

2.2 The school's location is shown here:

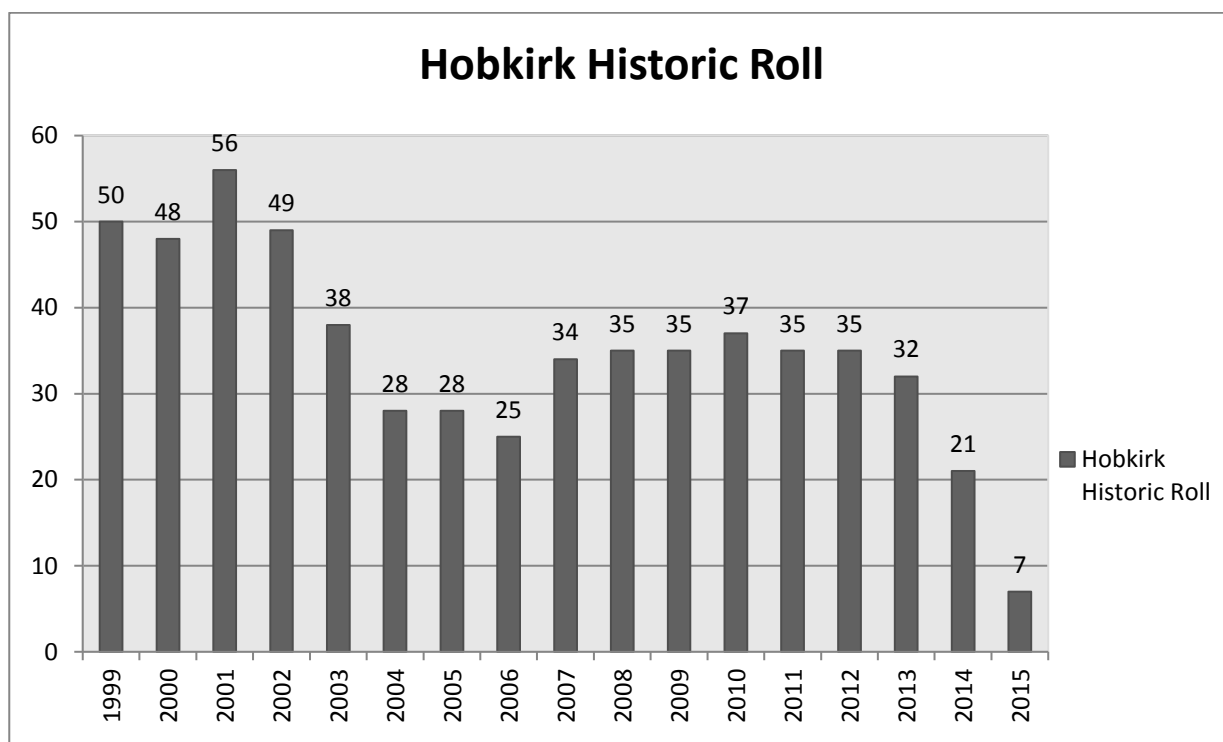


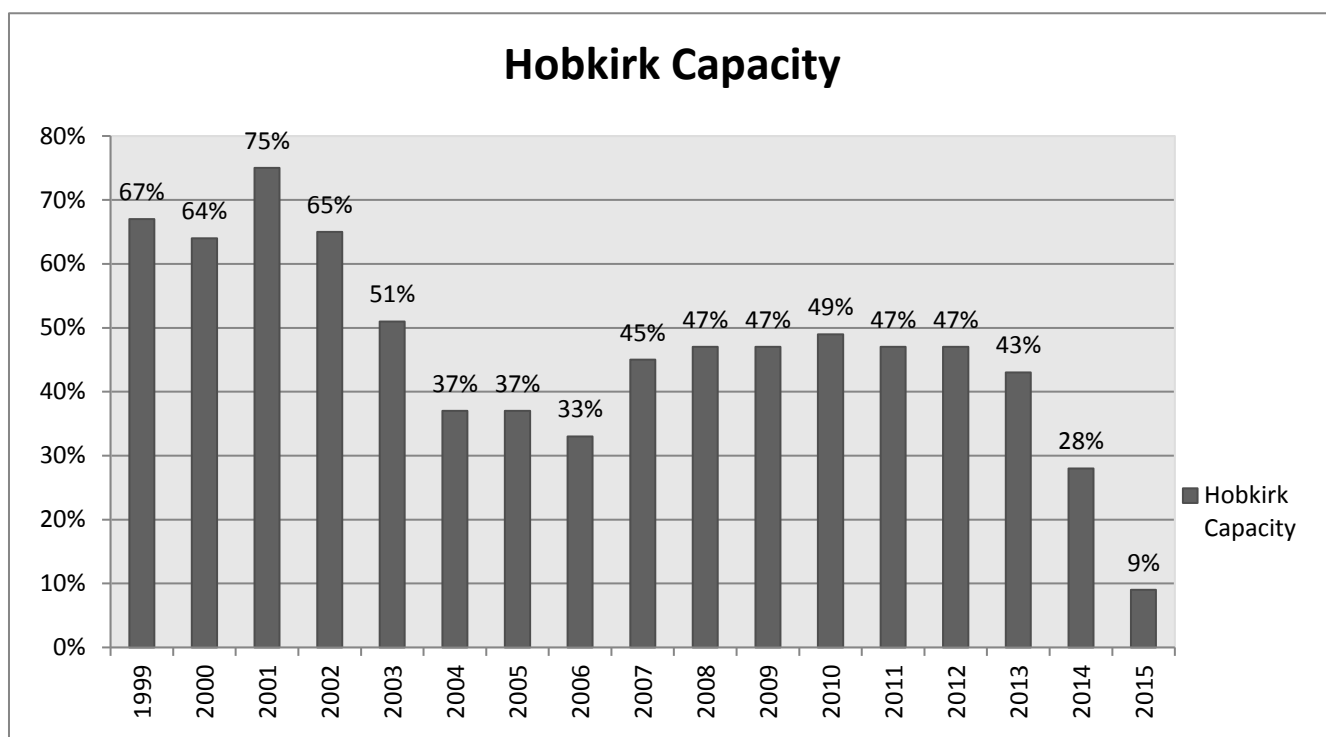
<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Rural Schools List 2017](#)

2.3 The catchment area is shown below:-



- 2.4 The school roll had declined significantly over recent years. In 2000/01 there were 56 pupils attending the school but by 2014/15 this reduced to 7 pupils, resulting in the school operating at only 9% of capacity.





- 2.5 In 2014/15 school year, there were 24 primary aged pupils residing within the Hobkirk catchment area; however only 7 were attending Hobkirk. 71% of catchment children attended other schools within the area through placement requests. 65% of these children had chosen to attend Denholm Primary School.
- 2.6 No children had enrolled in P1 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 attend either Denholm Primary School or primary schools in Hawick for P1 at the start of the new school year.
- 2.7 Given the considerable drop in the school roll, the Council 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 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. The potential educational benefits were discussed should the children be able to attend a larger primary school: greater opportunities to experience the skills and abilities of a wider staff group, greater opportunities for socialisation and collaborative learning and greater opportunities for participation in team activities. There was also recognition that the children might not be able to fully participate in the Curriculum for Excellence due to its requirements for collaboration and peer working among learners.
- 2.8 Following these discussions, the families of the 7 remaining pupils chose to make placing requests to other schools in the area, which were granted. Accordingly no pupils were enrolled to attend Hobkirk Primary in the 2015/2016 session.

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 As the majority of placement requests from the area (65%) were to Denholm Primary School, indicating a parental preference, the decision was also made to temporarily rezone the catchment area for Hobkirk to Denholm Primary School. The two schools were already partner schools, sharing a head-teacher, with Hobkirk pupils accessing facilities and activities in Denholm on a regular basis. As the schools are in the same secondary catchment zones and worked across the same learning area, transition was straightforward given the alignment in curricular programmes and teaching plans. It was agreed that during the rezoning period that transport would be provided for any new pupils in the catchment to Denholm Primary School
- 2.11 A condition survey was carried out on Hobkirk Primary School 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.
- 2.12 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 impact these have on the learning and teaching, leisure and social activities and health and wellbeing of all users.
- 2.13 The backlog maintenance costs at Hobkirk are currently estimated to be £229,000. 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 Denholm Primary School for subjects including ICT and PE.
- 2.14 In the current school year (2018/19) there are 24 primary school aged pupils residing in the Hobkirk catchment area; 88% of those children currently attend Denholm Primary School with the other 3 children attending primary schools in Jedburgh and Hawick through placement requests.

## **2 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. This 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%

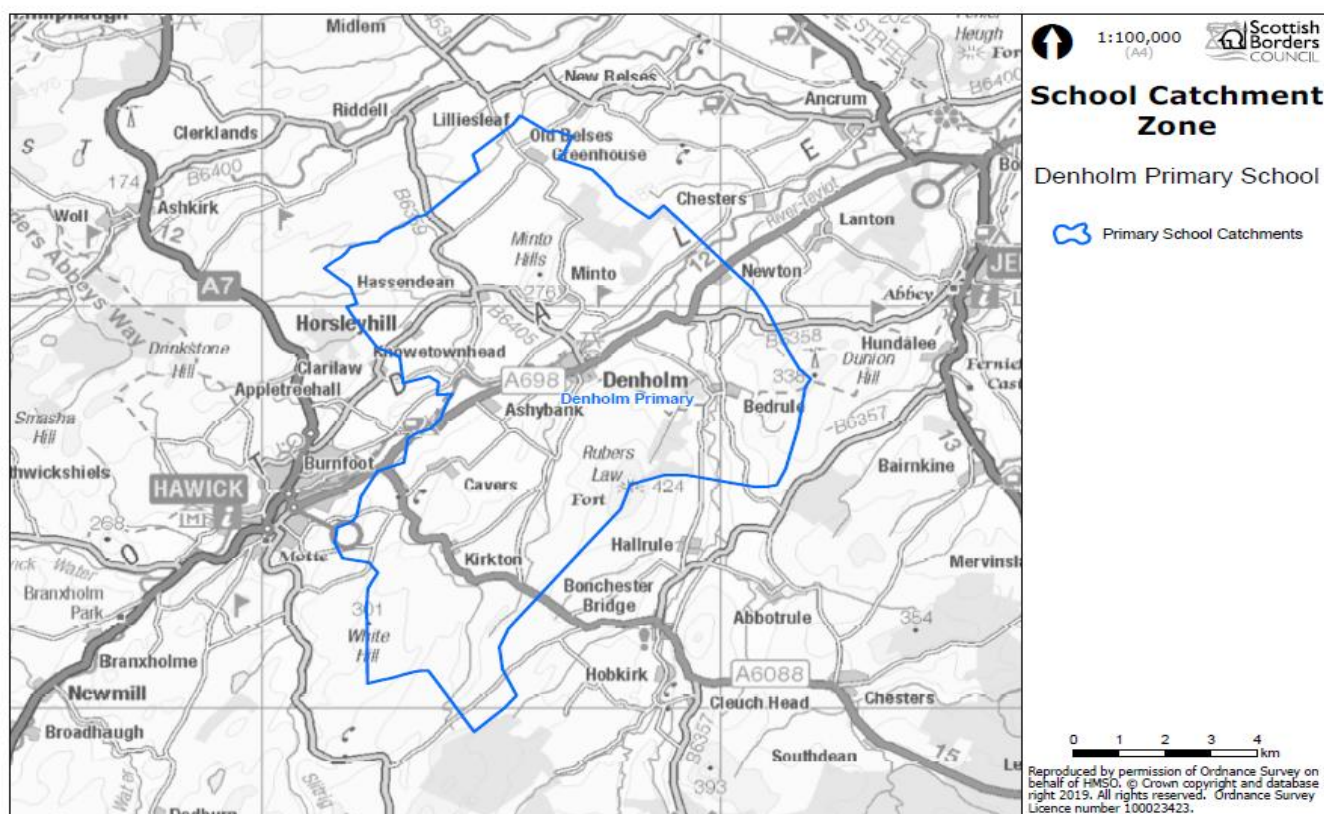
- 3.2 Council records (based on Early Learning and Primary enrolment forms) indicate that there are currently 8 pre-school aged children (aged 3+) in the Hobkirk catchment area; along with 24 primary school aged pupils.
- 3.3 The current Local Development Plan 2016 does not anticipate much development 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 DENHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL**

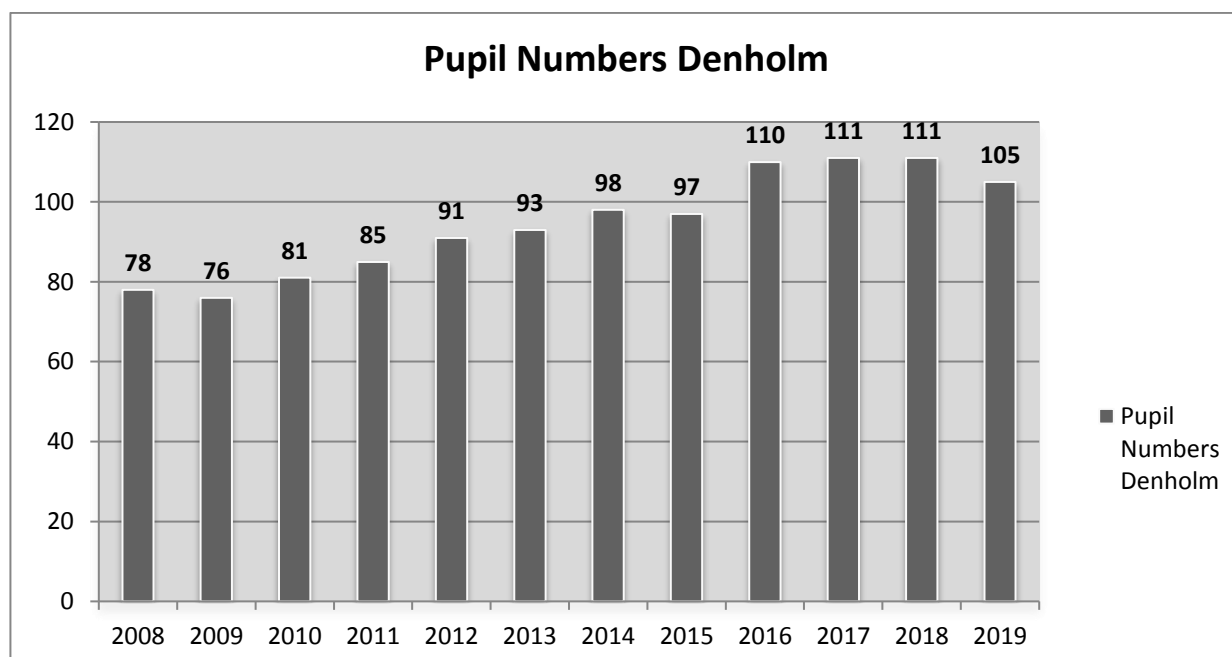
- 4.1 Denholm Primary School provides non-denominational primary education to pupils from the village of Denholm and surrounding area. The Scottish Government's Rural School List 2017<sup>3</sup> classifies Denholm Primary School as "Accessible-rural".
- 4.2. The catchment area for Denholm Primary is shown here:-

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Rural Schools List 2017





- 4.3 The school has capacity for 125 pupils. There are currently 105 pupils attending the school, in 5 composite classes.
- 4.4 Denholm Primary School was rebuilt and re-opened in October 2008 after a fire had damaged the original building. The school building is modern and spacious and has been designed to be environmentally efficient to run. The school roll has grown steadily over the years and is currently operating at 84% of capacity. There are 21 pupils residing in the Hobkirk Primary catchment area that currently attend Denholm Primary.



- 4.5 A condition survey was carried out on the building in 2016 and the overall site is rated as Condition A - Good (Performing well and operating efficiently)<sup>4</sup>. A suitability survey was carried out in 2012 on Denholm Primary School and it was rated A - Good (performing well and operating efficiently)<sup>5</sup>. Both surveys are undertaken on a minimum of a 5 year cycle and data is reviewed and investment planned accordingly annually.
- 4.6 The most recent inspection carried out by HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) in 2015 and can be accessed by the following link:-  
[Education Scotland Inspection Report June 2015](#)

## 5 PRE-CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 Scottish Borders Council commenced a pre-consultation process in 2016 focused on the current school estate provision and what it should aspire to look like across the region. The Council undertook to engage with all stakeholders to obtain information and opinions regarding all the current school estate and to seek views and ideas in respect of the vision of the future.
- 5.2 The five strategic principles that were adopted when reviewing the school estate were:
- 5.2.1 Increased educational and learning opportunities for all generations within the community;
  - 5.2.2 Improved outcomes for children and young people;
  - 5.2.3 Sustainability;
  - 5.2.4 Future proofing the school estate; and
  - 5.2.5 Affordability.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 In November 2017 the Council's Executive (Education) Committee, as part of the next stage of the School Estate Review, approved a proposal to re-visit the mothballed schools.
- 5.5 As Hobkirk Primary School is a Rural School, specific provisions under Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended (**2010 Act**) apply. Council officers have, in accordance with the 2010 Act, prepared detailed Options Appraisals regarding in respect of Hobkirk Primary School; analysing a range of available options to ensure that the most reasonable and appropriate course of action was identified. A summary of the Options Appraisals is given in below. The complete Options Appraisal Report is attached as **Appendix 1**.
- 5.6 The Options Appraisal concludes that the closure of Hobkirk Primary School is the most appropriate option. The statutory consultation process is set out in the 2010 Act. The principal purpose of the 2010 Act is to provide strong, accountable statutory consultation practices and procedures that local authorities must apply to their handling of all proposals for school closures and other major changes to schools. All consultation processes are expected to be robust, open, transparent and fair, and be seen to be so. They are also expected to be consistent across Scotland. This proposal paper has been prepared in accordance with the terms of the 2010 Act.

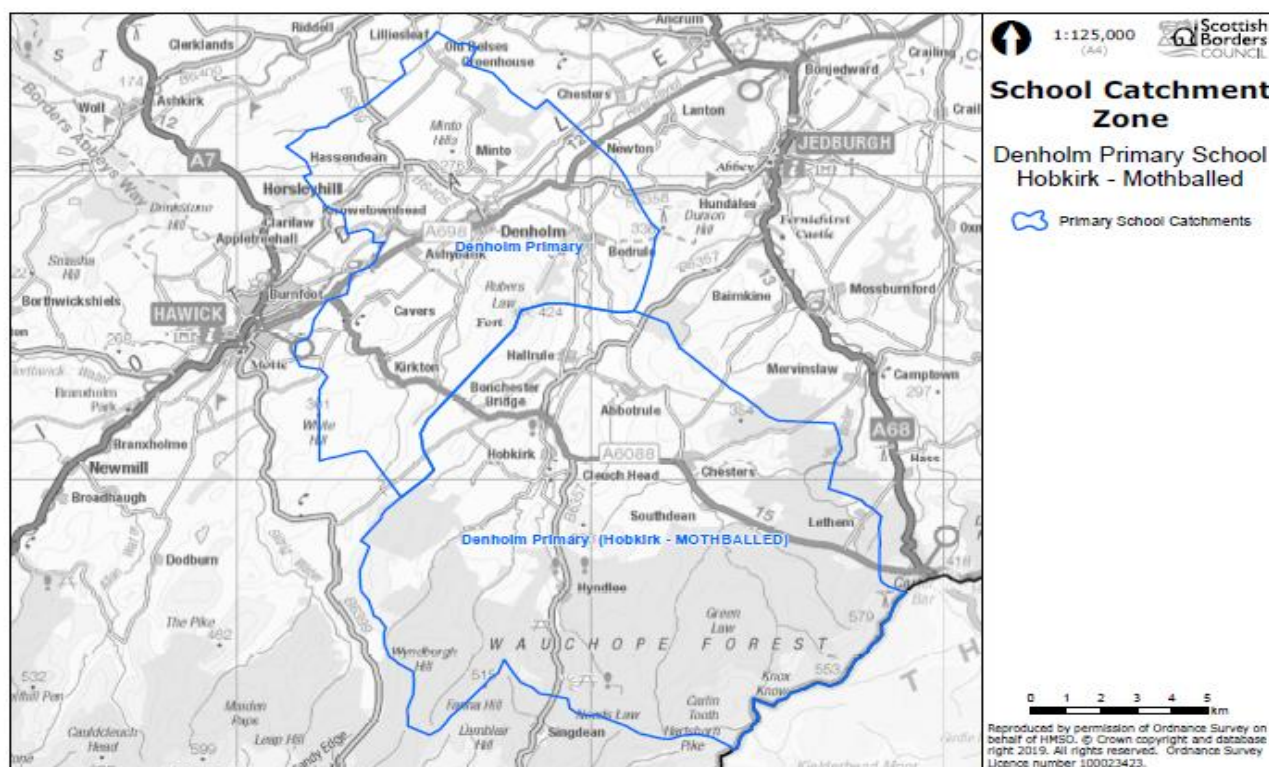
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<sup>4</sup> Condition is an assessment of physical condition of the school and its grounds.

<sup>5</sup> Suitability is 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.

## 6 PROPOSALS AND REASONS FOR THE PROPOSALS

- 6.1. The Council wishes to consult with parents, pupils, staff and the community on a proposal to permanently close Hobkirk Primary School. It is also proposed that, following the closure of Hobkirk, the catchment area for Hobkirk will be permanently re-zoned into the catchment area for Denholm Primary School.
- 6.2 The proposed combined catchment area will be as follows:-



- 6.3 There are a number of reasons why the Council wishes to consult on these Proposals:-
- 6.3.1 Councils 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. The school education provided has to be flexible to fit individual needs and to be tailored by age ability and aptitude.
- 6.3.2 Councils also have a statutory responsibility in terms of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 to achieve best value and optimum efficiency. The Council is therefore required to regularly review services. The organisation of the school estate is kept under regular review, including the need for school provision and other factors, such as altering catchment areas and the implementation of shared headships.
- 6.3.3 Scottish Borders Council is committed to promote exemplary learning environments to support dynamic learner progression from early years through to entry into employment, vocational study or further and higher education.
- 6.3.4 Prior to Hobkirk Primary School being mothballed, the roll numbers at Hobkirk had experienced a significant decline (down 88% from 2001-2014). Part of the reason for the fall in roll was that many parents/carers had decided to make placing requests for their children to be educated in a range of other primary schools, including Denholm Primary School and primary schools in Jedburgh and Hawick. Since November 2015 there have been no enquiries made in relation to children enrolling at Hobkirk Primary School and no children are likely to attend the school in the future.
- 6.3.5 It is considered that the low pupil roll at Hobkirk Primary School had presented challenges in providing the breadth of learning and social and emotional experiences required to meet



the needs of pupils. Prior to mothballing Hobkirk pupils were already accessing Denholm for certain lessons, with increasing number choosing to attend Denholm in preference to Hobkirk.

- 6.3.6 Following mothballing, c83% of pupils from the Hobkirk catchment area has been attending Denholm Primary School. Denholm Primary School offers a modern learning environment that encourages high levels of achievement and provides a wide range of opportunities for children to achieve their full potential as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.
- 6.3.7 If Hobkirk Primary school were to re-open in August 2019 (with the same catchment or increased catchment) it is unclear how many (if any) pupils would wish to enrol at the school. Council officers have been unable to identify demand in the local area to re-open Hobkirk Primary School. Parents/carers appear satisfied with their children's learning experiences and outcomes at the schools they are attending.
- 6.3.8 The learning environment and facilities at Denholm Primary are rated A; even with works carried out to rectify some of the building and fabric issues at Hobkirk, there would still be a requirement to share facilities with Denholm for certain subjects including PE and ICT.
- 6.3.9 A partner provider currently provides Early Learning and Childcare at Denholm Primary School. We have been unable to identify and demand for additional provision to be provided in the Hobkirk area, with children from the Hobkirk catchment currently attending Denholm. From August 2019 the Council will be providing funding for 1140 hours early learning and childcare for all 3-4 and eligible 2 year olds, in the Denholm catchment area.
- 6.3.10 Given the strong parental preference that has been indicated, it is proposed that Hobkirk Primary School's catchment area is permanently re-zoned to Denholm Primary School. Parents will continue to retain the right to make a placing request for another school of their choice as outlined in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended. It is Council's policy to support placement requests as far as reasonably possible.
- 6.3.11 Council officers consider that the proposal for pupils from the Hobkirk area to attend Denholm Primary School has strong educational benefits for pupils. Permanently re-zoning the catchment area will increase pupils' resilience through being part of a larger school community and will also help promote their social and emotional development by providing greater challenge as well as the opportunity to be part of a wider, age-appropriate peer group. Council officers have considered the provision of primary education within the Hobkirk area in the context of the needs of the pupils and the local community, both now and in the future. Information has been collated on pupil numbers, housebuilding, finances, the school, travel arrangements, environmental impact and the local area and community to inform the options.
- 6.3.12 The Council has engaged with stakeholders and has considered other uses for the premises prior to formulating these Proposals. The school has now been mothballed for over 3 years and the community has expressed a view that it is 'wasteful' to continue this in the long term, and that resources within the school and the school itself should have a future. At the community events, people were clear about the challenges which faced their community, less employment, fewer families, fewer pupils and more holiday homes or weekenders. However, they were positive about the possibilities and opportunities which could be created, if the school building was developed or sold.
- 6.3.13 Denholm is projected to sustain in the long term. Staffing at Denholm is settled. It would be challenging to create a leadership model for Hobkirk Primary School and attract staff to the school. The roll of the Denholm Primary School will be more sustainable if their catchment be permanently redrawn to include the catchment for Hobkirk Primary School. In turn this school may be more likely to maintain effective staffing levels and staff will have better opportunity to collaborate with colleagues .It will allow children to have larger

more diverse peer groups and to increase their networks and have improved experiences and outcomes.

## 7 OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 7.1 Scottish Government guidance indicates that local authorities should review a mothballed school within 3 years of mothballing. As Hobkirk is a rural school, the 2010 Act requires that prior to making a proposal to closure that all reasonable alternatives to closure are considered by a Council, with a closure proposal only being made if it is the most appropriate option. 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 2010 Act; in particular the provisions regarding rural schools. Through the Options Appraisal process a number of possible options were identified by the Council for the future of Hobkirk Primary School's namely:

OPTIONS FOR HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL	
<b>Option 1</b>	Reopen Hobkirk Primary School with its original catchment area
<b>Option 2</b>	Reopen Hobkirk Primary School with an expanded catchment area
<b>Option 3</b>	Continue mothballing Hobkirk Primary School, with the catchment area remaining zoned to Denholm Primary School
<b>Option 4</b>	Close Hobkirk Primary School, with the catchment area zoned permanently to Denholm Primary School

- 7.2 A summary of the Options Appraisals is given below. The complete Options Appraisal Report is published on the Scottish Borders Council website: <https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirk> and attached as Appendix 1.

## 8. **OPTION 1** **REOPEN HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH ITS ORIGINAL CATCHMENT AREA**

- 8.1 It is considered that this was not a reasonable alternative to closure. Council officers 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. 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. We have been unable to establish any planned development or business activity that would be likely to impact on the current demographics of the area.
- 8.2 Hobkirk is currently rated as a C for Condition and Suitability. The Council's estates team estimate that it would cost c£229,000 to remedy the current defects with the building. These works would allow the school building to be re-opened however pupils would still require to travel to Denholm Primary School to share facilities (including PE and ICT).
- 8.3 It is considered that while Hobkirk reopening would be likely to allow for greater involvement with the Hobkirk community, there could be educational disadvantages in reopening Hobkirk Primary School with a small school roll versus the combined provision that is currently provided. Many of the educational benefits that can be 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. The majority of Hobkirk catchment pupils attend Denholm, which provides the opportunity for smaller class sizes as the school comprises 5 composite classes, which cannot exceed 25 pupils. It is considered that few children and parents would be likely to support the resultant change in their catchment area to Hobkirk and removing the funded transport option to Denholm.

- 8.4 Changes to travel arrangements would be fairly neutral; some pupils would travel further and some less than before.
- 8.5 In conclusion it is not considered a reasonable or sustainable option to re-open Hobkirk Primary School with its original catchment zone.

## **9 OPTION 2**

### **REOPEN HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL AND REDELINEATE THE CATCHMENT AREA**

- 9.1 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 allow the school to be re-opened to provide a viable primary school for an enlarged catchment.
- 9.2 A mapping exercise of the postcodes of children in the neighbouring catchment areas has been carried out. This confirmed that there were no children in the neighbouring catchments living closer to Hobkirk Primary School than their current catchment school. In fact the majority of pupils in the neighbouring catchment areas live either in the Denholm or Newcastleton or in close vicinity. Given the rurality of the area, safe travel routes were also considered and it was concluded that the current travel plans would be preferable. Given the impact that amending catchment areas can have on schools this is not considered a reasonable option. Particularly as any changes to catchment areas would require a Statutory Consultation with identified Educational Benefits. Officers do not consider that there would be an arguable basis for catchment amendment on the basis of demand or 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 as it is unlikely that the catchment area could be made more sustainable on this basis.

## **10 OPTION 3**

### **CONTINUE MOTHBALLING HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL WITH THE PUPILS ZONED TO DENHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL**

- 10.1 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 to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 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."*
- 10.2 The school has been mothballed for over 3 years. Pupil numbers are not projected to rise in the future and there is currently no significant planned housebuilding or business development to increase population numbers.
- 10.3 At the community meetings people were disappointed 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.

- 10.8 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.

## **11 OPTION 4 – THE PROPOSAL**

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

- 11.1 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 Services to declare the school building as surplus and alternative uses for the building could then be progressed.
- 11.2 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

### **EVIDENCE OF DEMAND FOR HOBKIRK**

- 11.3 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%). There are currently 24 primary school aged children residing in the catchment area for Hobkirk Primary School attending other schools in the cluster (83% attend Denholm). Council officers have not identified demand for the school to be re-opened and have been advised that the community already considers the school is closed.
- 11.4 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%.
- 11.5 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**

- 11.6 The Council has statutory duties relating to the provision of education in the Scottish Borders. Children and Young People's Services key priorities are to improve well-being, inclusion, experiences and opportunities for all our children and young people, both within and outwith the formal curriculum. As part of a multi-agency partnership, the following priorities have been identified within the Children and Young People's Services Plan:

- 11.6.1 Keeping children and young people safe;
- 11.6.2 Promoting the health and well-being of all children and young people and reducing health inequalities;

- 11.6.3 Improving the well-being and life chances for our most vulnerable children and young people;
- 11.6.4 Increasing participation and engagement
- 11.6.5 Raising attainment and achievement for all and closing the gap between the lowest and highest achievers.
- 11.7 The Curriculum for Excellence is the national curriculum for Scottish schools. It aims to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they will need if they are to flourish in life, learning and work now and in the future. The Council has a further duty to deliver a service which meets the criteria for best value, in terms of efficiency, effectiveness, economy and equal opportunities, and which meets the agreed priorities in the Single Outcome Agreement and Scottish Borders Council's Corporate Plan.
- 11.8 The purpose of the Curriculum for Excellence is encapsulated in the four capacities to enable each child or young person to be:
  - a successful learner;
  - a confident individual;
  - a responsible citizen; and
  - an effective contributor.
- 11.9 The Curriculum for Excellence encourages children and young people to develop through different learning experiences. These can include:-
  - 11.9.1 Collaborative learning - where children can work collectively within a group setting. This allows children to learn from each other and to share experiences and skills;
  - 11.9.2 Individual learning- where children are given opportunities to make choices about their own learning. This encourages children to learn in the most effective way for them;
  - 11.9.3 Peer to peer learning and assessment;
  - 11.9.4 Relevance in learning, where children learn through experiences;
  - 11.9.5 Outdoor learning – where learning takes place out of the classroom or school setting.
- 11.10 The Educational Benefits of the Proposals have been assessed taking account of the requirements under legislation and the priorities and aims of the Children and Young People's Services Plan and having regard to the terms and guidance of the Schools (Consultation ) (Scotland) Act 2010.

## **EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS FOR THE PUPILS**

- 11.11 The educational benefits of the Proposals have been considered:-
  - 11.11.1 Pupils would be attending a school with a larger peer group where the children will be able to experience a variety of learning and teaching experiences offered through flexibility of grouping.
  - 11.11.2 Some of the educational benefits arise not just from larger pupil numbers but also because 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.
  - 11.11.3 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.
  - 11.11.4 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.

- 11.11.5 The facilities at Denholm Primary School have been designed for modern learning and therefore offer a more accessible and inclusive environment for all children.
- 11.11.6 A small school roll can restrict 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.
- 11.11.7 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.
- 11.11.8 The development of an Early Learning and Childcare structure across a larger catchment area involving more pupils provides a viable service-children at a younger age will have benefit from having an Early Learning and Childcare provision within the area with children attending who have similar interests and life experiences; the richness of the rural life will come through in an early level curriculum driven by child centred learning experiences.

## **EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS AND IMPACTS ON STAFF**

- 11.12 While it is recognised that some staff may prefer working in a small team, staff recruitment and retention can be more challenging in a small school. Staff can 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.

## **IMPACT ON PUPILS AT OTHER SCHOOLS IN THE COUNCIL AREA**

- 11.13 The impact on pupils at other schools is considered to be minimal as these Proposals reflect the current temporary arrangements that were put in place 3 years ago. Scottish Borders Council's policy of supporting parental choice for schools will continue with placement requests being accommodated as far as possible.

## **EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS - IMPACT UPON THE COMMUNITY**

- 11.14 The closure of Hobkirk Primary school would have little effect 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.
- 11.15 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 and bring support to parents and remove any feelings of isolation. The community will benefit from greater support.

## **LIKELY EFFECT ON THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

- 11.16 As Hobkirk Primary School is a rural school, special regard was paid to the rural factors in the Options Appraisal stage. It is considered that the Proposals will not adversely impact on local,

social or economic activities of that area. The Primary School has been mothballed for some time and the communities main issue is that they wish the school building to be put to some better use within the area.

- 11.17 The community made limited use of Hobkirk Primary School prior to mothballing for community events given that William Laidlaw Memorial Hall was available for community use within Bonchester Bridge. Views varied in the community regarding the long term use of the Hobkirk school building with a large number of suggestions at community events. People were clear about the challenges that faced the community, less employment, fewer families, less pupil and more holiday homes for weekenders.
- 11.18 Denholm Primary School is in the heart of a vibrant village and provides a gathering place for families and communities. The facilities within the Denholm Primary School building are suitable for the promotion of community use outside school hours. There are distinct nearby Village halls, separate from the school buildings, available for community activities in respect of each of the areas served by Hobkirk, Denholm, and Newcastleton Primary schools. Given the continuing village hall provision in all these locations it is believed that there will be no significant impact for the community to access a range of activities which could be located at Denholm Primary School.

### **LIKELY EFFECT CAUSED BY DIFFERENT TRAVELLING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 11.19 The rurality of the area considered fully in the Options Appraisal stage. The distance to Denholm Primary School is less for the provision of services from key Council departments and the school is generally considered more accessible. Changing the catchment of Hobkirk Primary School to Denholm Primary School during the mothballing has generally had a positive impact upon travelling time for children.
- 11.20 However 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. However there are always likely to be issues in the area because of the location. Headteachers take into account the local circumstances and in particular the ability of pupils and teachers to travel safely when deciding to close the school and/or send pupils home early. All schools in the Scottish Borders have an emergency closure plan for severe weather and this is drawn up by the Headteacher following a risk assessment.

### **FINANCIALS**

- 11.21 See **Appendix 2** for detailed financial information of the costs that would be associated with the running of a school with 7 pupils (reflecting the positions before mothballing). 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.
- 11.22 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. 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.

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

- 11.23 Pupils in the Hobkirk catchment area currently travel times on average of between 20 and 25 minutes miles to Denholm Primary School. This is not considered 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.

- 11.24 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. The impact for some children is that it has resulted in a longer school journey of 25 minutes, while for others it has shortened the journey.
- 11.25 From the community meetings concerns were not raised in terms of travel arrangements posing a problem or the additional distance being an issue.

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

- 11.26 Council officers have considered the impact upon the community and have held meetings with the community and the Community Council to discuss the proposals for the school. The majority of comments from the community were 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 final solution was required.
- 11.27 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.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- 11.28 Denholm Primary School currently accommodates pupils from Hobkirk Primary and the pupil numbers are not projected to increase significantly. Denholm Primary has capacity to continue to accommodate the projected pupil numbers.
- 11.29 Hobkirk has been mothballed for 3 years. Pupil numbers are not projected to rise within the Hobkirk catchment and there is no significant planned housebuilding.
- 11.30 At the community meetings people were disappointed 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.
- 11.31 The number of primary school aged children, in the catchment area, wishing to attend Hobkirk Primary School declined rapidly prior to mothballing. Officers have been unable to identify a demand within the community for the school to be re-opened. So it is possible that if it the school was to re-open in August 2019 that there might be no pupils enrolling at the school. Pupil projections in the catchment area do not indicate that the potential pupil numbers will increase in the future.
- 11.32 The distance between Hobkirk Primary School and Denholm Primary School is approximately 10 miles, which has had a resultant effect on pupil travel time. Pupils travelling from the east at Southdean/Chesters who were previously transported to Hobkirk have seen an increase in



journey time of approximately 25 minutes whilst pupils now travelling from the village of Bonchester Bridge have a total journey time of 20 minutes.

- 11.33 The condition and suitability of Hobkirk is currently rated as C – Poor. It is estimated that it would cost c£229k to remedy the current defects at the school. Pupils attending Hobkirk would still be required to travel to Denholm for PE and ICT.
- 11.34 Re-opening the school may also have a negative impact on the learning experiences and outcomes for pupils at Denholm as this may reduce the number of pupils at their school. This may also impact on the staff at Denholm as this may reduce the number of staff available for both schools in a sometimes already challenging employment pool. The head teacher time may also reduce as they will have 2 schools to concentrate on rather than 1. While the potential loss of pupils is not likely to impact on the sustainability of Denholm; it will be likely to restrict the breadth of experiences and opportunities that can be enjoyed from a wider pupil population which may also impact on teacher numbers and parent involvement in the school community.
- 11.35 The Options Appraisal has demonstrated that the option for the permanent closure of Hobkirk Primary School with the pupils zoned to Denholm Primary School is both reasonable and the most appropriate option.

## 12. SUMMARY OF THE PROCESS FOR THIS PROPOSAL PAPER

- 12.1 This Proposal Paper has been prepared by the Council's Children and Young People's Services in accordance with the 2010 Act. The 2010 Act sets out a consultation procedure that a Local Authority must follow for certain proposals affecting schools in their area. The 2010 Act and its explanatory notes are available for reference at the following websites, respectively:  
[Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#)  
[Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010 - Explanatory Notes](#)
- 12.2 The Proposals to close Hobkirk and to re-delineate the catchment area are deemed relevant proposals in terms of the 2010 Act (the **Proposal**) and is therefore subject to the statutory consultation procedure specified in the 2010 Act.
- 12.3 The proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:
- Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA
  - Hobkirk Primary School, Bonchester Bridge, TD9 8JU
  - Denholm Primary School, Denholm, Hawick, TD9 8LZ
  - Jedburgh Grammar School, Jedburgh, TD8 6DQ
  - Hawick High School, Hawick, TD9 0EG
  - Hawick Library, North Bridge Street, Hawick TD9 9QT

and published on the Scottish Borders Council website:  
<https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirk>

- 12.4 Copies of this Proposal Paper are available in English and other languages upon request) from:

Hobkirk Primary School Consultation  
Children and Young People's Services  
Scottish Borders Council  
Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA  
Telephone: 01835 825080

E-mail: [schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk)

12.5 Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- the parents/carers of the children who attend an affected school;
- the Parent Council of an affected school;
- the parent/carers of any children likely to attend an affected school within two years of the date of the publication of the Proposal Paper;
- the pupils attending an affected school;
- the Staff (teaching and non-teaching) at an affected school;
- any Trade Union which is representative of the staff;
- The Community Councils of Hobkirk, Denholm & District, Newcastleton, Jedburgh and Hawick;
- the community planning partnership (as defined in section 4(5) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015) for the area where an affected school is situated or any other community planning partnership that the Education Authority considers relevant;
- the constituency Member of the Scottish Parliament;
- the constituency Member of Parliament;
- the List Members of the Scottish Parliament.

12.6 **Advertisement in Local Media**

Advertisements were placed in the relevant local media the week beginning 11 March 2019, giving the dates for the consultation period and for the public meeting.

12.7 **Consultation Period**

The consultation for the Proposals will run from 7 March 2019 and will end on 2 May 2019. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

12.8 **Public Meetings**

A public meeting will be held, the details of which are set out below:

**16 April 2019 at 7pm**

**at**

**William Laidlaw Memorial Hall  
Bonchester Bridge**

12.9 **Format of Public Meeting**

Anyone wishing to attend the public meeting is invited to do so. The meeting, which will be convened by Scottish Borders Council, will be addressed by officers from Children and Young People's Services and other relevant parties.

The meetings will provide an opportunity to:

- Hear more about the Proposals
- Ask questions about the Proposals
- Have your views recorded so that they can be taken into account as part of the proposal process.

A note will be taken at the meeting of comments, questions and officer responses. These notes will be published on the Council website and a copy will be made available on request. These notes will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

#### 12.10 Meetings with Pupils and Staff

Meetings will be held with pupils and staff in the affected schools. A record of questions, responses and views will be taken and this will be published in the Consultation Report.

### HAVE YOUR SAY - RESPONDING TO THE PROPOSALS

13.1 A consultation regarding a proposed change to your child's or your community's school is your chance to share your views. Your responses can really shape and influence future decisions; you can play your part by:

- Submitting a written or electronic response to the Council as outlined below;
- Attending the public meeting on 16 April 2019 at 7pm at William Laidlaw Memorial Hall in Bonchester Bridge- ask questions; raise concerns/issues; make suggestions;
- Speaking to your local Councillors;
- Engaging with your school's Parent Council. The Parent Council can play a key role in engaging with the Council throughout the process;
- Make representations as part of your Community;
- Informing Scottish Borders Council if you think that this Proposal Paper has significant inaccuracies or omissions.

13.2 All interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposals by making written or electronic submissions to:

Hobkirk School Consultation  
Children and Young People's Services  
Scottish Borders Council  
Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA  
Or

Web Address: <https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirk>

13.3 A response form is available from Children & Young People's Services, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose TD6 0SA or online at <https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirk>.

13.4 Use of the response form is not compulsory. If you wish to respond by letter or electronically, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, "pupil", "parent", "carer", "relative", "former

13.5 Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically, should note that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish pupil, "teacher in school", "member of the community" etc. Responses from Parent Councils, staff and Pupil Councils are particularly welcome. If anyone does not wish their response to be made publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: "I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Scottish Borders Council and officers of Education Scotland and the Scottish Government". Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available.

13.6 All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, **2 May 2019**.

13.7 Education Scotland has prepared guidance regarding School Consultations. This can be accessed at [Education Scotland's Guidance on School Consultations](#)

## **14 INVOLVEMENT OF EDUCATION SCOTLAND**

A copy of this Proposal document will be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also receive a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period or, if Education Scotland agree, a summary of them. Education Scotland will further receive a summary of any oral representations made to the Council at the public meeting that will be held and, as available (and so far as otherwise practicable), a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposals not later than 3 weeks after the Council has sent them all representations and documents mentioned above. In some cases, it is possible for them to extend the 3 weeks with the agreement of the Authority. However, for the avoidance of doubt, the 3 week period will not start until after the consultation period has ended. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may enter the affected school(s) and make such reasonable enquiries of such people there as they consider appropriate and may make such reasonable enquiries of such other people as they consider appropriate.

## **15. PREPARATION OF CONSULTATION REPORT**

- 15.1 The Council will review the Proposals having regard to the Education Scotland report, the written representations that it has received and oral representations made to it by any person at the public meeting. It will then prepare a Consultation Report.
- 15.2 This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be advertised in local newspapers. It will be available on the Council website and from Council Headquarters, the public libraries in Hawick and Jedburgh, as well as Hobkirk Primary School and Denholm Primary School, free of charge. Anyone who made written representations during the consultation period will also be informed about the report. The report will include a record of the total number of written representations made during the consultation period, a summary of the written representations, a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting, the Authority's response to the Education Scotland Report as well as any written or oral representations it has received, together with a copy of the Education Scotland Report and any other relevant information, including details of any alleged inaccuracies and how these have been handled.
- 15.3 The Consultation Report will be published and available for further consideration for a period of three weeks, before it is presented to Full Council at the next scheduled Council meeting.

## **16. NOTE ON CORRECTIONS**

- 16.1 If you consider that there is an inaccuracy or omission in this Paper please contact Scottish Borders Council at  
  
Hobkirk Primary School Consultation  
Children and Young People's Services  
Scottish Borders Council  
Council Headquarters  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
TD6 0SA  
  
Telephone: 01835 825080  
E-mail: [schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk](mailto:schoolestates@scotborders.gov.uk)
- 16.2 If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this Proposal Paper, either by Scottish Borders Council or any person, Scottish Borders Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or there has been an inaccuracy. It will then take appropriate action which may include

the issue of a correction or the re-issuing of the Proposal Paper, or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and Education Scotland will be advised

## **17 SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL DECISION AND SCOTTISH MINISTERS CALL-IN**

- 17.1 No decision will be taken in regard to the Proposals or any changes put into effect by either the Council or the Council's Executive (Education) Committee until the statutory consultation process has been properly completed.
- 17.2 If the Council makes a final decision to implement the proposal to close Hobkirk Primary School, it will require to notify the Scottish Ministers of that decision, and provide them with a copy of the Proposal document and Consultation Report. This must be done within 6 working days of that decision. The Council must also publish on its website the fact that it has notified Scottish Ministers of its decision and of the period during which consultees have the opportunity to make representations to Ministers.
- 17.3 The Scottish Ministers have an 8 week period from the date of that final decision to decide if they will call-in a proposal regarding a closure. During the first three weeks of this period, anyone is able to make representations to Ministers on whether the decision should be called-in. Within the first 3 weeks of that 8 week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Until the outcome of the 8 week call-in process is known, the Council cannot proceed to implement the Proposals. Ministers may come to a decision sooner than eight weeks (but not before the three weeks for representations to be made to them has elapsed).
- 17.4 The Scottish Ministers may issue a call-in notice only if it appears to the Scottish Ministers that the Council has:-
  - 17.4.1 failed, in significant regard, to comply with the requirements of the 2010 Act in terms of a closure proposal; or
  - 17.4.2 failed to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to the decision to implement the closure proposal.
- 17.5 If Scottish Ministers decide to call in a closure proposal, they must refer it to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels for determination by a School Closure Review Panel. The Council, as the Education Authority, may not implement the closure proposals (wholly or partly) unless the Panel has granted consent to it (with or without conditions) and either the period for making an appeal to the Sheriff has expired or, if an appeal has been made, it has either been abandoned or the Sheriff has confirmed the Panel's decision.
- 17.6 The School Closure Review Panel may refuse to consent to the closure proposal, refuse consent and remit the closure proposal back to the Council as the Education Authority or grant their consent to the closure proposals subject to conditions or unconditionally.

- 17.7 The 2010 Act, as amended, gives Ministers and School Closure Review Panels the right to call on advice from Education Scotland in relation to a closure proposal at the call-in or determination stage.



**Stuart Easingwood**  
**Interim Service Director of Children & Young People**

7 March 2019

## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1** Options Appraisal Report

**Appendix 2** Spreadsheet Showing Current Revenue Costs for School Proposed for Closure



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



**HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL**

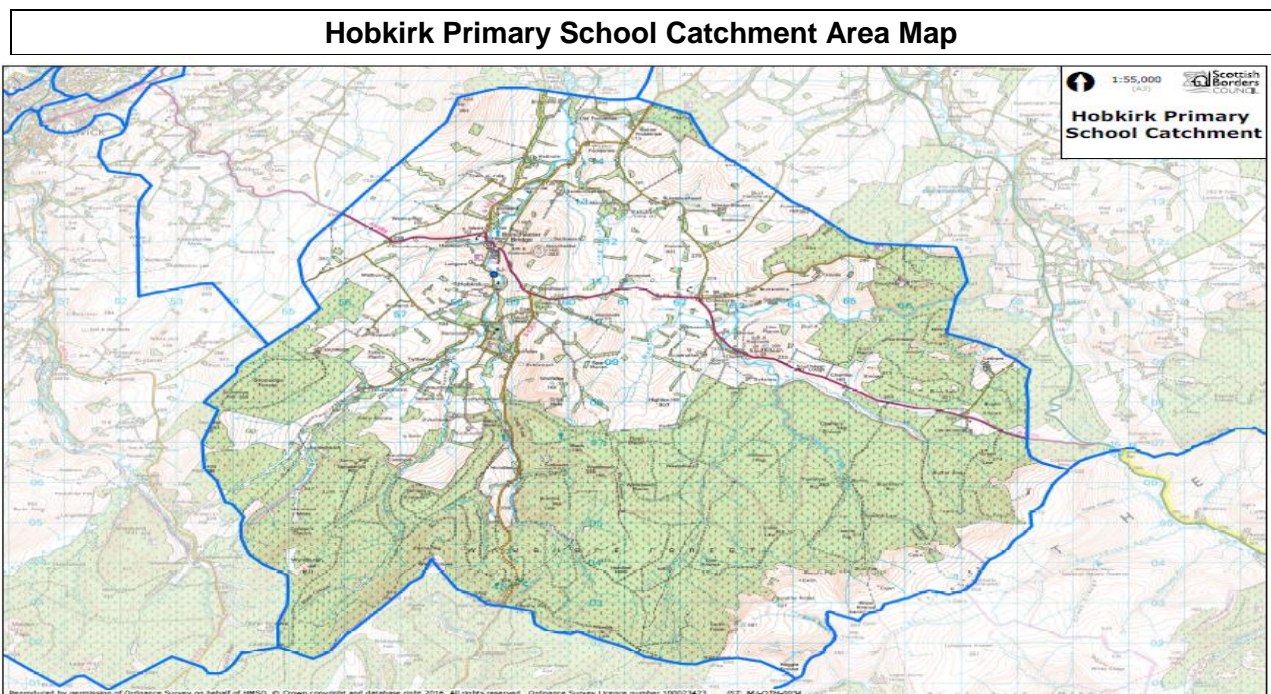


## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 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

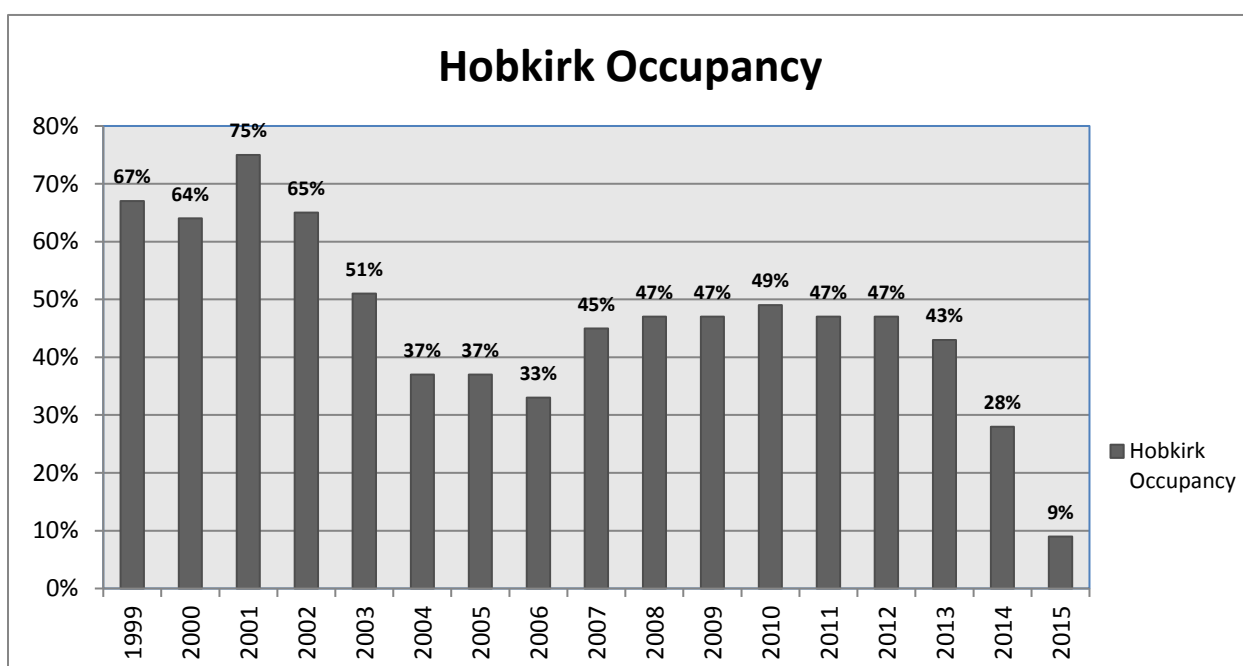
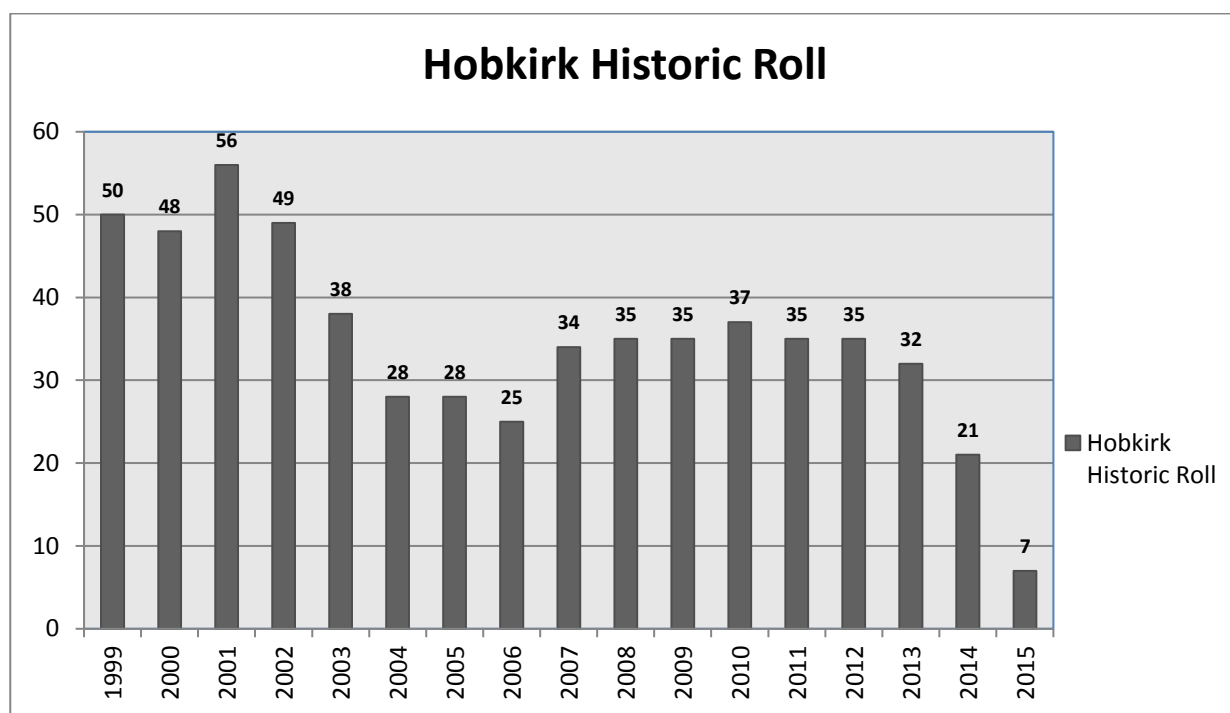
- 2.1 Hobkirk Primary School is a non-denominational primary school located between Hobkirk and Bonchester Bridge. The school opened in 1936, with capacity for 75 pupils. The school's catchment area is indicated below:



- 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. These travel arrangements have been in place for over 3 years. For some children 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.

APPENDIX 2 - SPREADSHEET SHOWING CURRENT REVENUE COSTS FOR SCHOOL PROPOSED FOR CLOSURE

Financial Template

Table 1	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Row 1	Current revenue costs for school proposed for closure			
		Costs for full financial year (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving school (enter name of school)	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)
Row 2	Name of School (enter name of school) (tick)			
Row 3	School costs			
Row 4	Employee costs - note 1			
Row 5	teaching staff	76,594	26,255	50,339
Row 6	support staff	24,113		24,113
Row 7	Teaching staff training (CPD etc.)			
Row 8	support staff training			
Row 9	Supply costs - note 2			
Row 10				
Row 11	Building costs:			
Row 12	property insurance	419		419
Row 13	non domestic rates			
Row 14	water & sewerage charges			
Row 15	utilities costs	4,218		4,218
Row 16	cleaning (contract or in-house)	4,660		4,660
Row 17	building repair & maintenance			
Row 18	grounds maintenance			
Row 19	facilities management costs - note 6	691		691
Row 20	revenue costs arising from capital			
Row 21	Other	1,860		1,759
Row 22				
Row 23	School operational costs:			
Row 24	learning materials			
Row 25	catering (contract or in-house)			
Row 26	SQA costs			

Table 2	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7
Capital costs		School prepared for closure	Receiving school
Capital Life Cycle cost - note 7			
Third party contributions to capital costs			

Table 3

Annual Property costs incurred (not-billing) until disposal	
property insurance	
non domestic rates	
water & sewerage charges	
energy costs	
cleaning (contract or in-house)	
security costs	
building repair & maintenance	
grounds maintenance	
facilities management costs	
other	
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL	

# APPENDIX 2 - SPREADSHEET SHOWING CURRENT REVENUE COSTS FOR SCHOOL PROPOSED FOR CLOSURE

Row 27	other school operational costs (e.g. loanok)			
Row 28				
Row 29	Transport costs: note 3			
Row 30	home to school		note 4	
Row 31	other pupil transport costs			
Row 32	staff travel	1,646		1,646
Row 33	SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	114,301		87,825
Row 34				
Row 35	Income:			
Row 36	Sale of meals			
Row 37	Lets			
Row 38	External care provider			
Row 39	Other			
Row 40	SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL			
Row 41				
Row 42	TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL			
Row 43				
Row 44	UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	114,301		

Table 4

Non-recurring revenue costs	
TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS	

Table 5

Impact on GAE - note 5	
GAE IMPACT	

## Notes

- The total costs incurred for teaching staff (row 5) and support staff (row 6) is required to be included. Column 2 should include the current costs for a full financial year for the school proposed for closure, and column 3 should include the additional cost to the receiving school as a result of staff transferring.  
For teaching staff, this should include regular teachers, itinerant teachers, learning support teaching staff and special education (ASN) staff.  
Itinerant teaching staff includes central support services such as English as additional language support, hearing, visually impaired services, educational psychology services.  
For support staff, this should include classroom assistants, administration staff and janitorial staff.  
For all staff the costs entered should include salary, NI and pension costs.  
If the school proposed for closure has less than 3 staff members, then the cumulative staff costs only should be given in row 5 (for both teaching and support staff), so as to avoid possible disclosure of individual salaries.  
Training costs should be identified separately in rows 7 and 8.
- Supply costs to cover teaching and support staff. This may be held in a central budget, be devolved or shared across the budgets.
- 'Home to school' pupil transport costs should include those school transport costs incurred in accordance with Council policy. 'Other pupil transport costs' will cover costs incurred for the transport of pupils for activities such as swimming etc.
- Row 30 of column 3 should include the additional transport costs related to the increased home to school transport arrangements that are put in place in accordance with Council policy. This figure is therefore likely to be considerably higher than current costs.
- This table is to capture the impact on the revenue support grant as a result of changes to GAE. Impact on GAE should consider the issues covered in the GAE section of the guidance document that accompanies this template.
- Facilities management costs will include costs related to caretaking, janitorial and security.
- The capital costs for the receiving school should be taken across the life cycle of the school in line with the life expectancy of that school. The capital costs for the school proposed for closure should be taken across the same life cycle period.

## **Appendix 2 – Minutes of Public Meeting 16 April 2019**

### **Statutory Consultation on Proposal to Close Hobkirk Primary School Minute of Public Meeting at William Laidlaw Memorial Hall, Bonchester Bridge on 16 April 2019 at 7pm**

#### **Present from Scottish Borders Council (SBC)**

Michelle Strong (**MS**) – Chief Officer Education  
Lesley Munro (**LM**) – Lead Education Officer, School Estates  
Gillian Sellar (**GS**) – Solicitor, School Estates

There were 8 members of the community present

#### **Introduction**

MS welcomed everyone to the meeting and SBC officers introduced themselves

#### **Presentation**

MS presented an overview of SBC's proposals to permanently close Hobkirk Primary School and to re-zone the catchment area to Denholm Primary School (copy of presentation attached).

- Members of the community expressed a view that the school roll had dropped when one of the teachers at the school was promoted and left the school. Following this several parents submitted placement requests. A community member expressed that it is important to have the right teacher at a small school.
- It was also stated that some parents preferred their children to go to schools nearer their place of work in Jedburgh and Hawick. MS acknowledged that parents made decisions regarding schools based on a number of reasons including work, lifestyle and personal experience.
- It was asked why it was policy to allow placement requests as this had led to the school roll dropping dramatically. MS explained that the law provides parents with the right to make placement requests and that there are only limited grounds for a local authority to refuse them e.g. no room at the school or would require the employment of a further teacher. MS advised that all primary school placement requests made to date for the next school year (2019/20) had been granted by SBC. It was suggested by a community member that a ground of refusal should be to protect a rural school.
- The change in population demographics across the area was discussed.
- Questions were asked by a community member about the children now attending Denholm and whether parents had expressed any concerns about the change of school? Is transport provided? Would all the Hobkirk children be guaranteed a place at Denholm even if the roll grew?  
MS asked that the parents appear satisfied with the school and that all pupils from Hobkirk were transported to Denholm. LM explained that if the decision was made to close Hobkirk, Denholm would be the area's catchment school and the children in the catchment would be entitled to a space at the school. LM advised that the roll and projected roll numbers are tracked carefully and if the roll was to exceed the capacity then the Council would provide additional space to accommodate all the children. LM advised that SBC is currently reviewing its capacity calculations for schools
- A member of the community advised that there are other links between Bonchester Bridge and Denholm as the 2 villages share a minister.
- A community member asked if Denholm is too big. With a roll of 105, MS advised that this was considered a healthy size for a school as it allowed a wide curriculum to be provided and a breadth of learning experiences and opportunities for the pupils.
- It was discussed how SBC believes that social development is an important part of education and that having a peer group is a good preparation for life and High School.



- There was a discussion about composite classes. LM advised that there are composite classes at several schools across the region, with the biggest schools also having composites as well as smaller schools. LM advised that children are not taught at age level but in accordance with ability and that composite classes work well.
- A community member queried the journey times and pick up times for younger children. GS confirmed that the journey times to Denholm were on average 20-25 minutes each way and she had been advised that pick up times were from 8.10am to 8.20am. It was discussed whether this was reasonable. These timings are reflected in several school clusters across the area and are considered reasonable.
- The community members all seemed in agreement that continued mothballing was not a reasonable option.
- There was discussion about the building. LM advised that it is currently the responsibility of the Education department at SBC. Several community members expressed their concern about the deterioration of the building and their concerns regarding the impact that further deterioration of the school building could have on the village. There is no appetite for the building to become a greater eyesore.
- LM explained that the building (if it was no longer to be a school) could be an opportunity for the community. If the school was to be closed then interested parties would be able to discuss any proposals that they have for the building. SBC's Estates Team will deal with the building if the school is to be closed. The preferred route is always a sale but SBC will always take into account the Community Empowerment Act. It would be advisable for interested community groups to consider any plans that they may have for the building. SBC have a team who can support and work with a community to develop a business plan. LM advised that if there is no interest in the building at some point the decision may be made to demolish if that is what the community would prefer.
- There was discussion regarding planning permissions in the village with some considering that SEPA would make it difficult to get approvals given the flood risk and geography of the area.
- A community member expressed the view that the village hall met all the needs of the community.
- There was discussion regarding the decline of agriculture as an employer across the area. One farm was given as an example that used to have almost 70 people living on the farm now there were no farm workers.
- The decline in the school roll was discussed further. LM explained that SBC is currently working with all schools with a roll of under 50 as part of its School Estate Review. The aim is to make the schools more sustainable. Once the school roll is below 50 it is hard for the school to recover and often when a school drops to one class it can be difficult to maintain the roll as parents make choices regarding their children's education.

The meeting was concluded and MS thanked everyone for their attendance.



## **Hobkirk Primary School Public Meeting**



**Tuesday 16 April 2019**



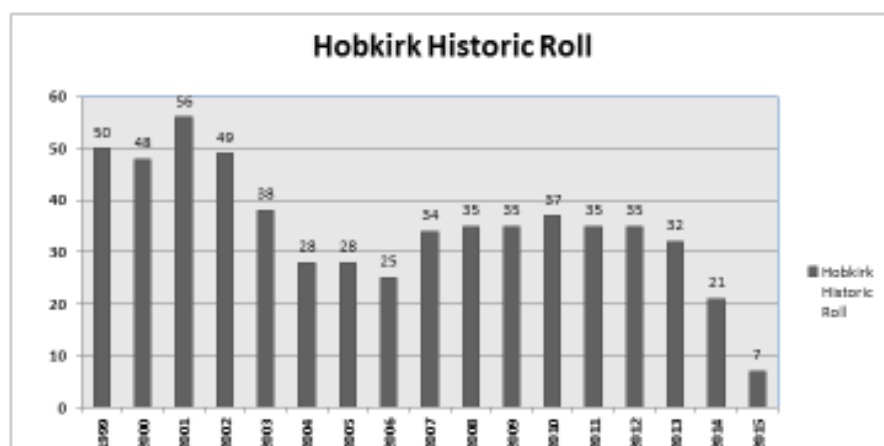
## **School Estate Consultation in relation to the proposal to close Hobkirk Primary School**

The Proposals are that

- Hobkirk Primary School is permanently closed
- If the school is to be closed, the catchment area is permanently re-zoned to Denholm Primary School

## REASONS FOR THE PROPOSAL

- Significant drop in school roll after sustained increase in placement requests to out of catchment schools:-



## REASON FOR THE PROPOSAL

- At the time of mothballing there were 24 primary aged children in the Hobkirk catchment area. 71% of these children were attending out of catchment schools through placement requests. 11 of these 17 children were attending Denholm Primary School.
- Currently 21 children from the original Hobkirk catchment area attend Denholm Primary School (88% of current catchment).
- Curriculum for Excellence – smaller school rolls can constrain opportunities for full range of curricular and learning opportunities
- Smaller rolls can constrain opportunities for team and group work
- The proposal seeks to strengthen the children's social and emotional development
- Denholm provides a rural school option in the community with Grade A facilities

## **STATUTORY CONSULTATIONS**

- Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the consultation process that local authorities must follow when proposing a permanent change to any school
- This includes:
  - Publishing a proposal paper including an Educational Benefits Statement
  - 6 week consultation period (minimum of 30 school days)
  - Holding a public meeting
  - Education Scotland meeting with parents, pupils and staff and report on Educational Benefits
  - Council must publish a consultation report responding to issues raised during the consultation

## **STATUTORY CONSULTATION (cont'd)**

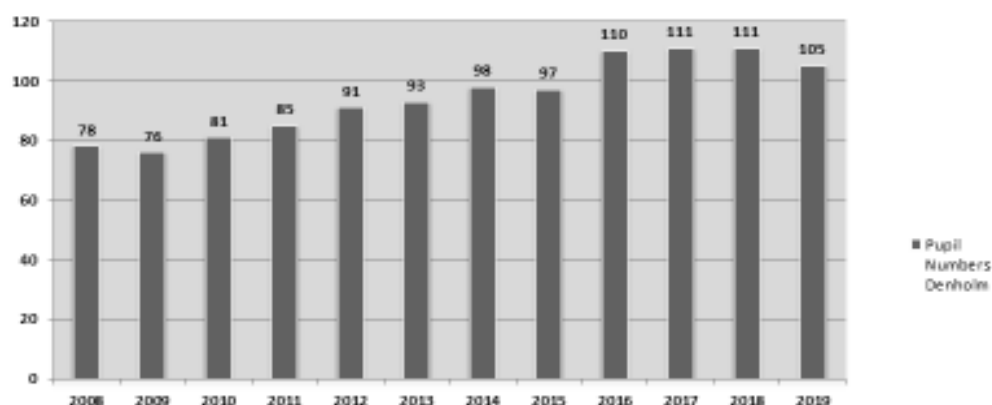
- Council make a decision following a 3 week consultation period subsequent to the publication of the consultation report
- Scottish Ministers have 8 weeks to call in a proposal regarding closure for referral to Schools Closure Panel
- If Schools Closure Panel do not support closure a future closure proposal cannot be consulted on for a minimum of 5 years

## EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS TO PROPOSAL

- Opportunities for children to develop a peer group within the community
- Opportunities for increased team and collaborative working
- Exposure to a wider learning experiences
- Improved transitions to High School
- Help to improve social and emotional development
- Increased opportunities to participate in activities, including sports and the arts

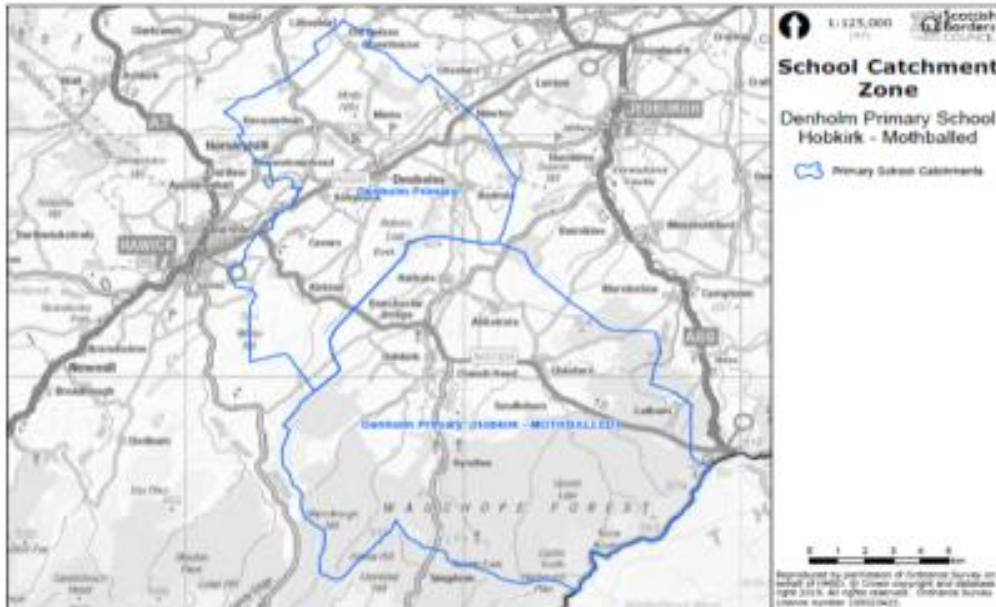
## DENHOLM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Pupil Numbers Denholm



- Denholm Primary School has capacity for 125 pupils

## Proposed Catchment Area



### NEXT STEPS

- This is a chance for you to have your say . Proposal Papers and Response Forms available here today and at <https://scotborders.citizenspace.com/children-and-young-people/hobkirk>
- Consultation Period is open until 2 May 2019
- Education Scotland will visit Hobkirk and Denholm and meet with pupils, parents and staff
- A Consultation Report will be published for further comments in May/June 2019
- Report on Consultation Process will go to Council in June 2019
- Scottish Government then review the decision and the consultation process

## **QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS**



## Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Scottish Borders Council to close Hobkirk Primary School.

May 2019



## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Scottish Borders Council's proposal to close Hobkirk Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the schools; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the sites of Denholm Primary School and Hobkirk Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Hobkirk Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

## 2. Consultation process

2.1 Scottish Borders Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The council undertook the consultation between 7 March and 2 May 2019. Copies of the proposal document were made available to consultees and an advertisement was placed in the local press. A public meeting held at William Laidlaw Memorial Hall, Bonchester on 16 April 2019

was attended by eight people. A total of five people responded to the consultation of whom two agreed and three disagreed with the proposal to close Hobkirk Primary School.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Scottish Borders Council's proposal has the potential to be of educational benefit. Hobkirk Primary School has been mothballed since 2015 when the school roll dropped to seven children. Since then, pupils have been zoned to Denholm Primary School. A majority of the parents of the 24 children living in the catchment area of Hobkirk Primary School had made placing requests to other schools, mostly to Denholm Primary School which was paired with Hobkirk Primary School for shared headship and other arrangements. Denholm Primary School is a larger school with capacity for 125 children and a current roll of 105. It is a modern, well designed and well equipped building providing a positive learning environment including good physical education facilities. Hobkirk Primary School is a much older building and is currently in a poor condition. In addition to benefitting from a better learning environment, children attending Denholm Primary School would benefit from a broader range of opportunities to learn with their peers and engage in collaborative learning. Children would be able to learn from each other and share experiences and skills. Children would have potentially more opportunities to develop confidence and social skills and to learn to take responsibility through working with others across a wider range of ages. Children would benefit from more opportunities to engage in team sports and games and to take part in musical and artistic performances.

3.2 Scottish Borders Council's proposal is consistent with its statutory responsibility to secure best value in its use of resources. The estimated cost of bringing the Hobkirk Primary School building to a basic standard for reopening would be difficult to justify since there is no clear prospect of a significant increase in the school roll.

3.3 Parents, children and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors were in agreement with the council's proposal. Whilst they regretted the loss of a small rural school, they could see no reasonable alternative to its permanent closure. Parents reported that they would continue to send their children to Denholm Primary School even if Hobkirk Primary School were to reopen. Children valued their learning experience and other opportunities at Denholm Primary School. They enjoyed learning with their peers and spoke enthusiastically about the learning environment and facilities available at the school. Those who had attended Hobkirk Primary School in the past spoke favourably about the better opportunities available at Denholm Primary School. Children wondered what might happen to the Hobkirk Primary School building should the council implement its proposal and expressed a desire to be part of the discussions the council has undertaken to hold with the community. The council will need to consider this in its final report.

3.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard.

3.5 The council conducted an options appraisal to assess any reasonable alternatives to the permanent closure of Hobkirk Primary School. It identified three other options. The council considered an option to reopen Hobkirk Primary School with its existing catchment and, on the basis of lack of community demand and projected pupil numbers, reasonably concluded that this was not a viable alternative. A second option to reopen Hobkirk Primary School and re-delineate its catchment area was not considered reasonable since this would not have any clear educational benefits for children attending neighbouring schools and would involve longer school travel times for more children. The third option to continue mothballing was not considered to be viable or an appropriate use of resources.

3.6 Scottish Borders Council has engaged with the local community prior to and since the mothballing of Hobkirk Primary School. There is limited use of the school building by local community groups, since a village hall is available for community meetings and activities. Stakeholders, including children, have expressed concerns about the future of the empty school building and what will happen to items of significance to the local community such as sporting trophies and photographs. The council will need to consider this in its final paper.

3.7 The council considered the likely effect of different travel arrangements. The distance from Hobkirk Primary School to Denholm Primary School is ten miles. Travel times by school transport for some children in the Hobkirk Primary School catchment area of approximately 20 to 25 minutes duration are in line with arrangements at other schools in Scottish Borders Council. For some children attending Denholm Primary School, the mothballing of Hobkirk Primary School has resulted in reduced travel time. Prior to mothballing paired school arrangements required routine travel by children between the two schools for some aspects of learning including physical education lessons. Overall, the impact of different travel arrangements resulting from the council's proposal is modest.

#### 4. Summary

The Scottish Borders Council's proposal to permanently close Hobkirk Primary School and rezone its catchment area to Denholm Primary School is of potential educational benefit. It will formalise an arrangement that has been in place since Hobkirk Primary School was mothballed in 2015. Children would benefit from a positive learning environment in a modern building with better facilities. Children would have a potentially broader range of learning experiences including better opportunities to learn and socialise with their peers. The council will need to outline how it will continue to engage with the local community on the future of the school building and on the preservation of relevant school artefacts in its final report.

HM Inspectors  
May 2019