

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

THE RESULT OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL THAT:

- **CURRENT EDUCATION PROVISION IN SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ITS EXISTING BUILDING BE DISCONTINUED WITH EFFECT FROM JUNE 2008, OR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THEREAFTER.**
- **FURTHER THAT THE FUTURE PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL PROVISION FOR PUPILS CURRENTLY ATTENDING SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL SHOULD BE DETERMINED BY THE COUNCIL IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN THIS REPORT.**

APPENDIX 1- THE CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS FROM INTERESTED PARTIES ON THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS ARE AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION IN THE MEMBER'S INFORMATION POINT.

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Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the views expressed and the issues raised resulting from the public consultation exercise on the future of Sorn Primary School and to recommend accordingly.
- 1.2 On the 7 November 2007, East Ayrshire Council's Cabinet approved the issue of a consultation document which proposed that:
- Current education provision in Sorn Primary School and its existing building be discontinued with effect from June 2008, or as soon as possible thereafter.
 - Further that the Sorn Primary School pupils continue their primary school education at another establishment, in accordance with one of the options set out within the report, as yet to be determined.

A copy of the consultative document is attached as Appendix 1.

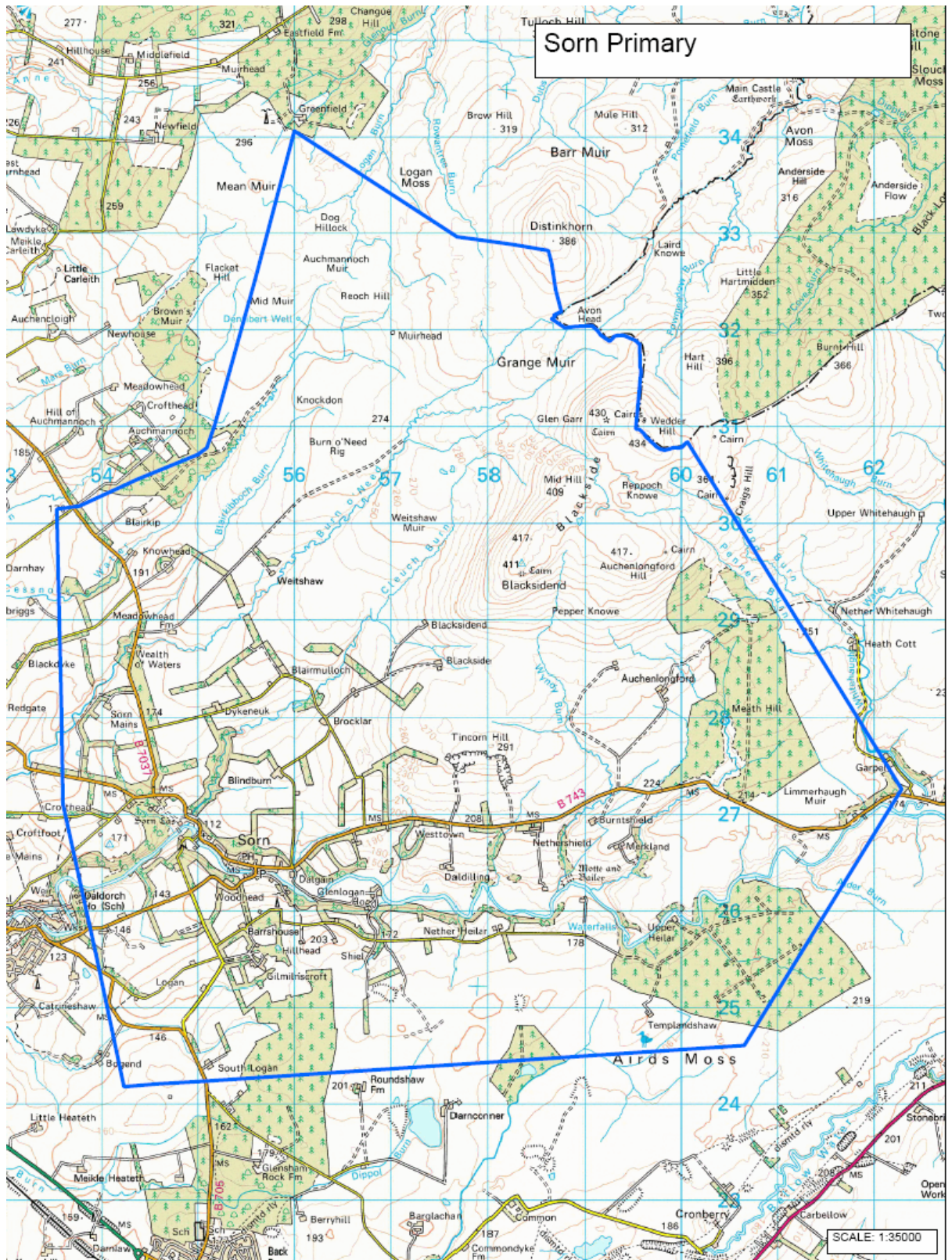
- 1.3 The main issues raised in the consultative document were:
- The need for multi composite classes in smaller schools;
 - Resource management in smaller schools with multi composite classes;
 - The potential for limited interaction with other pupils of a similar age and a reduction in the breadth of the curriculum;
 - The apparent difficulty in retaining and recruiting staff in smaller rural schools;
 - Serious building deficiencies limit the ability to deliver a modern curriculum, including those increasing elements dependent on ICT.

1.4 The Consultative Document, approved by Cabinet, offered a range of options open to public consideration. The options listed for Sorn Primary were :-

- Option 1 - The status quo : retain Sorn Primary;
- Option 2 - Close Sorn Primary and transfer the pupils to Catrine Primary;
and
- Option 3 - Close Sorn Primary and transfer the pupils to Mauchline Primary.

2. SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL

2.1 Catchment Area



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2.2 Accommodation and Capacity

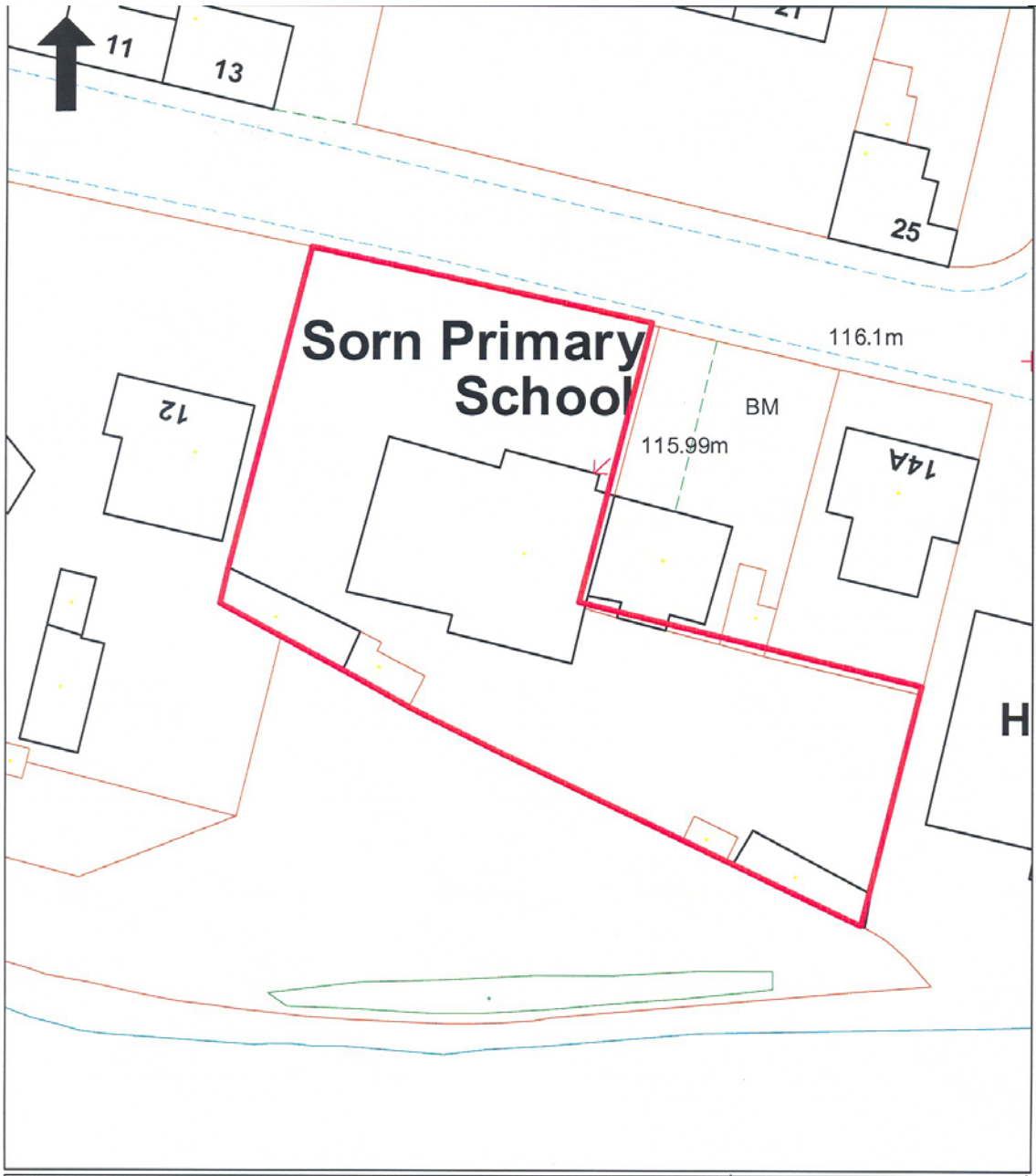
- 2.2.1 Constructed in the 1850's, Sorn Primary consists of 4 teaching rooms. There are no General Purpose areas within the building. Also located within the building is office accommodation for the Head Teacher and clerical assistant. There is a small storage area which is supplemented by two external metal storage containers. Also, the school has no gymnasium, dining hall or flexible working areas and has inadequate toilet provision.
- 2.2.2 The planning capacity of a school is calculated by dividing the total area of teaching rooms by the space allocation per child (1.7m² in a closed classroom). The working capacity takes account of maximum class sizes, for example, composite classes which are limited to 25. Based on the Council's space allocation, in Sorn, 3 of the classrooms could accommodate 29, 28 and 27 pupils respectively; however, due to maximum class sizes for composite classes the capacity of these rooms is limited to 25 each. The fourth classroom can accommodate 17 pupils. Therefore, the planning capacity of the school is 101, with a working capacity of 92. As of 25 February 2008, there were 71 pupils attending Sorn primary, which equates to an occupancy level of 70.3%

The school structure presently has 4 classes made up as follows :-

Primary 1/2, Primary 3/4, Primary 5 and Primary 6/7.

2.3 School Layout and Photographs

Outline of Sorn Primary School building and the school grounds.





Photograph 1 : Front elevation from the entrance gate



Photograph 2 : Classroom 1 – This room was previously used as a General Purpose room and also doubles as the staff room. Due to space restrictions this room has a maximum pupil capacity of 17.



Photograph 3 : Classroom 2. The capacity of this room is limited to 25 due to the maximum composite class size.



Photograph 4 : Classroom 3. As with Classroom 2 the capacity of this room is limited to 25 due to composite class restrictions.



Photograph 5 : Class 4. The capacity of this room is also limited to 25 due to composite class restrictions.



Photograph 6 : The Internal Corridor. The area on the far left is where classroom assistants and teachers spend their non class contact time.



Photograph 7 : The rear playground. Shown in the picture is one of the metal storage containers which are required due to lack of space within the building.

2.4 Building Condition

- 2.4.1 At the time of the Consultation Document's publication it was estimated that capital investment of £420,000 was required to address major component issues within Sorn Primary School.
- 2.4.2 To ensure that Cabinet, in considering the outcomes of the consultation had the best information available, a re-survey on the school was carried out in February 2008; this ensured that reinstatement costs for the school building reflect current prices. It should be noted that while an exercise is undertaken annually to update Core Fact data on the school estate for the Scottish Government, this was brought forward to inform this proposal. This work was undertaken jointly by officers from Education and Property Services, with the results being costed by Quantity Surveyors from Technical Services. The results of this exercise have provided an up to date knowledge of the required capital investment as highlighted below. In summary, the estimated capital requirement in the next 10 years is now calculated to be £680,000. A breakdown of the component factors and rating is detailed below.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT REQUIREMENT					
	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	TOTAL (P1 - P3)	(Required After 10 Yrs)
SUMMARY	£	£	£		£
Reroofing	-	88,000	-	88,000	-
Window & External Door Replacement	175,000	-	-	175,000	-
Internal Refurbishment	-	130,000	19,000	149,000	-
Heating & Boiler Replacement	-	123,000	-	123,000	18,000
Electrical Works - Rewiring	-	-	-	-	59,000
CCTV and Sprinkler Systems	-	113,000	-	113,000	-
External Works	16,000	16,000	-	32,000	-
TOTAL	191,000	470,000	19,000	680,000	77,000

2.4.3 As stated, the projected future 10 year investment costs for the building have been calculated to be in the order of £680,000. Such investment requirements coupled with a current pupil roll of 71, as at 25 February 2008, does not reflect efficient use of the Council's resources.

2.5 School Information

2.5.1 Current Pupil Roll

The pupil roll reported at the September 2007 census was 67. At 25 February 2008 the roll had risen to 71 pupils.

2.5.2 Placing requests

The current pupil roll of 71 includes 35 young people who attend from outwith the school's catchment area. This represents 49.3% of the total school population. At present there are no pupils attending Sorn Primary from other local authority areas.

2.5.3 Attainment data

Percentages attaining expected levels in national assessments.

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Reading	94.4	93.8	65.5	68.6	79.1
Writing	91.7	91.7	92.7	74.5	72.1
Mathematics	100.0	97.9	92.7	80.4	90.7

Attainment in 2006/07 at Sorn Primary for reading and writing is in line with the authority average at 79% and 72% respectively. It is worth noting that performance at Sorn, as in all small schools, can be significantly skewed by the smaller pupil roll. For example, mathematics attainment at Sorn PS for 2006/07 is 91% compared against 83% for primary schools as a whole. In this case the 8% difference represents just three pupils.

2.5.4 HMIE Report Outcomes

The most recent HMIE report on Sorn Primary School was issued in January 2004. HM Inspectors comments are detailed below :-

"HM Inspectors identified the following key strengths :-

- The strong sense of improvement in the school, much of which was due to the Head Teacher's high quality leadership;
- The very good and purposeful staff teamwork;
- High levels of attainment in both English language and mathematics;
- Very good levels of support for pupils;
- Careful and positive attention afforded to the pastoral care of pupils; and
- Very effective partnerships between the school, parents and the local community."

The report also commented that :-

"The school should continue to provide high quality and improving education. In doing so, it should take account of the need to :-

- develop more active learning opportunities for pupils, including regular use of computers;
- ensure that learning activities offer appropriate pace and challenge for pupils; and

- improve aspects of the school's accommodation.”

2.5.5 Number of Staff by Category

Teaching Staff

Using Council formulae the school is entitled to a teaching cohort of 4.75 FTE (full time equivalent). In addition to this the Authority has provided 0.5 FTE until June 2008 and 0.2 FTE until the end of financial year 2007/08 respectively, in recognition of local priorities.

Ancillary Staff

In addition to the teaching complement Sorn Primary School has 0.8 FTE clerical support, and 1.0 FTE classroom assistants. Janitation and cleaning hours of 32.25 hours are allocated to the school and 1.0 FTE individual performs this task.

2.5.6 List of Extra Curricular Activities

The Head Teacher has advised that whilst the school does not organise any extra curricular activities directly, there is a volunteer who coaches badminton in the Village Hall every Friday.

The Sorn Educational Trust (SET) run after school care in the Village Hall. SET claim this activity funds approximately 20% of the hall's annual running costs.

2.5.7 Inclusion

The Council is committed to a policy of inclusion. A number of changes in legislation (principally the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004) bring obligations to ensure that all have equal access to facilities. Possibilities offered under this proposal would address a number of issues related to equal access.

3. THE CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Written representations on the Cabinet's proposals were sought from interested parties in terms of the Education (Publications and Consultation etc) (Scotland) Regulations 1981 and Amendment Regulations 1987, 1988 1989 and 2007.
- 3.2 In accordance with statutory requirements parents of affected schools and the appropriate Parent Councils have been consulted. Copies of the consultation document were also made available to the staffs of Sorn Primary School, Mauchline Primary School and Catrine Primary School, representatives of teacher and staff unions, the appropriate Members of the Scottish Parliament and the appropriate Member of Parliament.
- 3.3 The existence of the document was publicised in the press and copies were made widely available in the local community and to local interest groups. Additional copies of the Consultation Document were obtainable from the Department of Educational and Social Services, Council Headquarters, London Road, Kilmarnock, from the schools involved and through the Council Website at www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk.
- 3.4 In all, five meetings including one public meeting were arranged in partnership with the Parent Council of Sorn Primary. The meetings were attended by parents, staff and members of the community. In addition, the Chief Executive and other senior officers of the Council met with representatives of the Parent Council.
- 3.5 Meetings offered the opportunity for discussion and clarification of the proposals as well as a forum for people to express their views on the consultation proposals. Those organised for members of the community were well attended and gave the opportunity for very many views to be expressed.

4. RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION EXERCISE

4.1 A total of 559 written submissions was received, including those made by e-mail, . These submissions included those from:

- Sorn Primary School Parent Council (supported by 316 names)
- Sorn Primary School Pupil Council (minutes of meeting)
- Questionnaires completed by Primary 3 – 7 pupils attending Sorn Primary School
- Cathy Jamieson MSP
- Sandra Osborne MP
- Mauchline Primary School Parent Council
- Dalrymple Primary School Parent Council
- Darvel Primary School Parent Council
- Auchinleck Academy Parent Council
- Sorn Community Council
- Sorn Educational Trust
- Sorn Toddlers' Group
- Sorn Parish Agricultural Society
- Dalrymple Community Council
- Cumnock Academy Senior Management Team
- Individual pupils
- Individual parents
- Primary School Staff of the schools affected
- Other interested individuals

The 559 submissions included 56 copies of a questionnaire completed by pupils, a standard email response submitted by 229 individuals, a standard letter submitted by 125 individuals, 40 individual letters from pupils or recent former pupils, 76 individual letters and emails from parents/carers or other close relatives of pupils, two members of staff at Sorn Primary School, two head teachers of East Ayrshire educational establishments and approximately 58 submissions classified as 'other' from stakeholders and other interested parties. These groupings are as accurate as could be determined; however, in some cases it could not be determined whether they were written by a staff member, a parent or another interested party.

4.1.1 All but a few of the written responses favoured the status quo, Option 1. Three responses, from bodies outwith the immediate Sorn community, refrained from recommending support for any option. Options 2 and 3 received no support.

4.2 In addition to the written submissions, the meetings referred to above enabled a number of important issues to be raised. The following paragraphs summarise the issues raised at the meetings and in the written responses to the consultative document. Every effort has been made to summarise views as accurately as possible and, where appropriate, to provide in section 5 below, a balanced and informed response.

4.3 Public Meeting - 28 November 2007

4.3.1 The public meeting was held in Sorn Village Hall and chaired by the chairperson of Sorn Community Council. The meeting was attended by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services and other senior Council officers.

4.3.2 The following is a summary of the main issues raised by those attending the meeting.

- The community commented that the quality of education provision at Sorn Primary was excellent and compared very favourably against the schools listed at options 2 and 3 in the consultative document. Attendees believed that this was due to the size and intimate nature of Sorn Primary.
- Discussion also focused on how the working capacity of Sorn Primary had been calculated. Many present believed that the working capacity figures were over estimated¹.
- Individuals also sought clarification in relation to how pupil roll projection figures had been calculated and what factors were taken into account. Of particular concern to many was that the future rolls did not allow for placing requests which may be made into Sorn Primary.
- Detail on the level of primary education spending in East Ayrshire was raised; the community commented that it appeared from literature available to be below the majority of other Scottish education authorities. Some present believed that the real reason for the consultation proposals was financially related.
- Comments were also raised on the costs of property maintenance at Sorn Primary and the required investment costs for bringing the building up to acceptable standard.
- One individual asked if the proposals had been issued at the present time so as not to conflict with likely Government policy announcements on rural schools.
- The community also made links between the continued running of the village hall and the school, stating that the hall relied heavily on school/Council funding for its running costs. It was also commented that there were few Council facilities in the village of Sorn and that the Old People's Cabin was under threat of closure.

¹ Note: for the sake of clarity, the definitions on working and of planning capacities are to be found at paragraph 2.2.2 of this report.

4.3.4 It was clear from comments made from the floor that those present were overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the status quo, Option 1.

4.4 Written Responses

4.4.1 Sorn Primary School Parent Council

The Parent Council response, supported by a list of 316 names, representative of the wider community at Sorn, refutes the suggestion that Sorn children would be better served at either Mauchline Primary School or Catrine Primary School. The response also claims that the consultation document contains spurious, inaccurate and misleading data and that there ought to have been local input before the document was published.

Educational

Parent Council responses on a number of key issues are summarised below:-

The Parent Council response argues for the retention of Sorn Primary School as they claim pupil attainment at Sorn is well above the authority average and further that it regularly outperforms the schools nominated in Options 2 and 3. The response also rejects the suggestion that Sorn Primary School is unable to meet, in full, the delivery of A Curriculum for Excellence.

The Parent Council believes that no evidence has been produced to demonstrate that children's educational or social development will be improved if this proposal is accepted and it is claimed that no evidence is available to support the claim that resource management is more difficult in a multi-composite situation. The Parent Council further believes that small class sizes at Sorn are seen as a significant advantage to pupils.

The Parent Council response states that despite being class committed for some periods during the week the Head Teacher has sufficient time to manage the curriculum and ensure its effective delivery. This, they argue, does not, therefore, reduce the quality of the pupil's educational experience. The Parent Council response also refutes the argument that it can be more difficult to recruit and retain staff in a small school.

Building Related

The response claims that East Ayrshire Council's vision for the school estate ignores the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce a legislative presumption against the closure of rural schools. It is also claimed that this proposal removes choice for parents who wish to choose the 'small school experience' for their children.

The response further claims that East Ayrshire Council has failed Sorn Primary by not investing in the fabric of the school during the lifetime of the Council. The Parent Council also states that the school was not disadvantaged by the absence of a gymnasium / dining hall because it had

access to the excellent facilities at the nearby village hall. It is said that this arrangement benefited both the school and the village hall, which depends on income from the school for its viability.

The document claims that the investment required to make Sorn compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act was minimal when compared to the £300,000 required for this purpose at Catrine Primary. The Parent Council has also advised that a local contractor has offered to do this work at no cost to the Council².

The response also states that there was a possibility of not realising capital receipts from the sale of the Sorn site. The document claims that the site was gifted by the Sorn Estate “for educational purposes only, as a site for a school and ancillary grounds, in all time coming”.

The Parent Council notes East Ayrshire Council’s commitment to reducing surplus places but argues that by expanding capacity, in areas such as Mauchline, the number of surplus places has increased.

Pupil Roll Projections

The Parent Council disputes the accuracy of the Council’s roll projection figures, pointing out that the Local Plan indicates unprecedented housing development in each of the three areas affected by this consultation.

The Parent Council response also disputes the working capacity of the school. It is claimed that the working capacity has been capped at 75 and this should, therefore, be the recognised capacity of the school, not 92 as stated by the Council. It is argued by the Parent Council that the fact that Sorn Primary School has 25 children attending by placing request, far from being a negative, testifies to the excellence and popularity of the school.

Community Aspects

The Parent Council response quotes from Scottish Executive guidance that states “The gains that will be derived from a proposal, especially a closure must stand scrutiny and outweigh any negative effects” This proposal, it is claimed fails to address the issue of rural sustainability and development in and around Sorn. The Parent Council goes on to say that the consultation proposals also fail to show a definite educational advantage to the children of Sorn and do not demonstrate that gains outweigh any negative effects. The Parent Council also believes that there is a failure to demonstrate a sound financial case for closure.

A strong plea is made by the Parent Council for the retention of the school as the focal point of Sorn village community life. It is stated that the village hall relies for 70% of its income on the school and for 20% of its income on the After School Care club which, in turn, depends on the school. If the village

² Note: For the sake of clarity, the work proposed would not address all works required.

hall was to close, it is claimed that the Toddler Group, the Youth Group and the Women's Rural Institute would all be displaced and that the old folk's meeting place would be removed. It is also said that the possibility of closure of the Post Office would, if it came about, further reduce amenity.

Summary

The Parent Council expressed full support for Option 1, the status quo, while, at the same time it also calls on East Ayrshire Council to fulfil its commitment to the residents of Sorn as taxpayers and to invest in this successful school.

4.5 Sorn Primary School Pupil Council

Pupils responses came in the shape of meetings with the Pupil Council and questionnaires which had been completed during class time. The following comments were made during the process :-

- Pupils believe that the school should stay open and were upset at the closure proposal. Pupils further stated that a main advantage was that the school had small classes, and younger children are helped by the older children. They felt that the intimate nature of the school was very beneficial as all the children knew each other and related well. The vast majority of pupils thought that staff listened to what pupils had to say and that this was a positive aspect of the school.
- The pupils did recognise the building's physical limitations and believed more space was needed.

4.6 Cathy Jamieson, MSP

Ms Jamieson submitted a general response in relation to Littlemill Primary School and Littlemill Nursery Class; Sorn Primary School; St. Xavier's Primary School and Crossroads Primary School. Her response was based on views she had obtained in a number of meetings with local groups, and on parliamentary questions which she had submitted.

- Ms Jamieson reiterated a point made to her by a number of people, that instead of coming forward with a number of predetermined options, the Council might have engaged more directly with Parent Councils and communities, offering a series of meetings where information could have been imparted, rather than having, as they claimed, to demand meetings.
- Ms Jamieson regarded the proposals as being contrary to the status of small schools, which she states is set out by the Scottish Government as an intention to introduce a legislative presumption against the closure of rural schools. She also considered that the educational grounds for closure did not stand up to closer scrutiny.

- Ms. Jamieson noted that parents, in recognition of the need to achieve best value for the taxpayer, had put forward alternative proposals and that these merited consideration.
- Further issues raised by Ms Jamieson included that roll projections did not appear to take account of proposed new house building developments and that there was no indication that, in highlighting the financial advantages of closure, East Ayrshire Council had factored in the effect these closures would have on the GAE grant from the Government.
- Parents at each of the schools concerned had highlighted to Ms. Jamieson the important role which the school plays in the wider community. At Sorn, the school was described as the ‘heart and soul’ of the village. Without the school, it is claimed that the village would be a less attractive place to live; there were also fears for the safety of children being transported to another school and concerns about the increased length of the school day for young children.
- Ms. Jamieson was clear that there was no support for the closure of any of these schools and recommended that the Council withdraw the proposals and examine alternatives.

4.7 Sandra Osborne MP

Ms Osborne sent in a response echoing Ms Jamieson’s comments.

4.8 Individual Pupil and Recent Former Pupil Responses

- 4.8.1 In addition to a large number of standard letters and emails (details below) a total of 24 letters / emails were received from pupils and recent former pupils of the school³. The comments, in summary, detail expressions of affection for the school, stating that teachers are very much appreciated, educational standards are high and Sorn pupils go on to do well at Auchinleck Academy. The respondents also believe that small classes enable pupils to have more of the teacher’s time and attention and that the family like atmosphere meant there is no bullying at the school.
- 4.8.2 Several responses commented on the fact that the school is very much at the heart of the village community, and that its closure would damage the village with a closure of the village hall and possibly also the corner shop potentially following any school closure
- 4.8.3 A number of pupils also submitted a range of attractively designed posters whose general theme was that pupils would be sad if the school closed and that it should be saved.

³ Pupils and those describing themselves as former pupils have been taken together because their responses appear to come from a broadly similar perspective. Other responses mention the fact that the writer is a former pupil of the school, but they appear to be written from an adult perspective and have been considered elsewhere in this report.

4.9 Letters from Individual Parents and Close Family Members

- 4.9.1 A total of 76 individual letters and emails were received. This number excludes a large number of standard letters and emails, referred to below.
- 4.9.2 The strongest theme that emerged and which ran through most of the correspondence was support for the school. Sorn Primary School is seen as high achieving, delivering the core features of A Curriculum for Excellence, East Ayrshire Council's core values; producing happy, confident children and gaining higher attainment scores than neighbouring schools.
- 4.9.3 In support of this argument, several parents pointed out that they had either chosen to live in the village or had made a placing request to enable their child to attend Sorn Primary School. Several responses assert that composite classes did not disadvantage children, with one stating that they accelerate learning. Responses claim that no evidence had been provided to support the view that resource management was more difficult in a composite situation or that peer group interaction was a vital part of the learning process.
- 4.9.4 Several respondents expressed the view that the consultation had failed the key criterion stressed by Government guidelines on school closures, that any closure should demonstrably afford educational benefits to children. Parents believed this case was supported by the fact that attainment rates at Sorn outperformed those of the schools listed in options 2 and 3 of the consultation document. Some parents thought their children would get at best, grudging acceptance if they moved whilst others thought they would be subject to bullying. The proposal was also held by them to be in breach of the spirit of SNP policy as included in its manifesto and soon, as they further claimed, to be framed in legislation, namely, the presumption against the closure of rural schools. It was argued that if Sorn Primary was closed the Council would be removing the element of choice from parents who prefer to have their children educated in a small rural school.
- 4.9.5 The other major theme advanced in parental letters and emails was the effect closure of the school would have on the village and on village life. The most frequent comment was that the school is the "heart" of the Sorn community; that a lot of village life centres on the school and the village hall and that the activities for young people, together with the village activities and events that also involve young people, are what help to make Sorn a vibrant, thriving community. It was argued that Sorn's population is slowly increasing in size, with a small but steady amount of house building and that the closure of the school and its knock-on effects would probably make the village a less attractive place to live and might adversely affect house prices.
- 4.9.6 Many of the parental letters commented on the condition of the building and what they think should be done to address this. Several respondents claimed that the current issues with the building arose only because of neglect and lack of investment in its maintenance. A small number of letters suggested that the fabric of the building was not vitally important, as the present

condition of the building had not affected attainment. Further statements claim that it is the quality of teaching that makes a good school. Others suggested what might be done to upgrade the building and repeated the proposal contained in the Parent Council response.

4.9.7 Others expressed the view that the exercise was financially driven. A small number commented that whilst the need for savings was appreciated, closing Sorn Primary School was not the way to make them. Financial arguments contained in the Parent Council response were frequently repeated. Several respondents also took issue with the accuracy of roll projections at Sorn.

4.9.8 Other views expressed in the parental letters include:

- if children move to Catrine Primary School, their primary education will be upset again whilst Catrine is refurbished;
- travel to Mauchline would involve a treacherous 4½ mile (one way) commute;
- taxis and taxi drivers might be unreliable;
- Catrine and Mauchline communities harbour resentment against Sorn;
- there is no good private schooling available in the area;
- Catrine Primary School could be closed and merged with Auchinleck or Mauchline.

4.10 Comment from Sorn Community Groups

4.10.1 Sorn Community Council

The Community Council questioned why it was proposed to close a school that is near to capacity, arguing that the refurbishment costs were not prohibitive. The response urged Members to consider the socio-economic effects on the Sorn Community; the group stated that the village has already lost its public toilets and may lose the senior citizens' cabin and the Post Office.

4.10.2 Sorn Educational Trust - This organisation provides after school care, to 6pm each day, for children in the village. The Trust employs 3 qualified support workers and provides services to 28 families.

The response from the chairperson of the Trust argued that the closure of the school would mean the end of after school care which would mean no after school care close to home for Sorn residents. Closure of the school and the after school care would, it was claimed, involve loss of direct employment, with parents who rely on these facilities for access to employment, continuing education or retraining also being affected. The Trust also states that the village hall, which is the hub of the community, relies on the Trust for 20% of its annual income and would find it hard to sustain its continued operation with the loss of income from both the school and the Trust.

The Trust's response, endorsed by 28 signatories, also repeated a range of arguments advanced by the Parent Council for the retention of Sorn Primary

School. The most acceptable solution to Trust members is for East Ayrshire Council to upgrade the school so that it can continue to deliver A Curriculum for Excellence.

The Trust further suggested that the Council might purchase the former school house adjoining the school to enable complete refurbishment and extension of the school. An alternative option submitted is to build a new school at a cost estimated by the Trust of £1.2m. The Trust described features of the new accommodation and the advantages of a new build with potential funding options being described in some detail.

4.10.3 The Sorn Toddlers' Group

This group is made up of 14 parents of 18 children, all future pupils of Sorn Primary School. The Toddlers' group response repeats arguments advanced by the Parent Council, reinforcing the point that if the village hall closed the Toddlers Group would have nowhere to go.

4.10.4 Sorn Parish Agricultural Society

This organisation expressed the view that closure of the school would be part of a downturn in the rural way of life.

4.11 Staff From Sorn Primary

4.11.1 The Head Teacher of Sorn Primary submitted a response which carried the endorsement of several members of the staff. The response praised the Council for its vision of the school estate and learning and teaching. The correspondence highlighted a number of concerns staff have with regard to the fabric of the school building. Their primary concern is the lack of working space and storage. In addition, they also express concern about the poor condition of the front playground's surface.

4.11.2 The staff response also comments on the lack of adequate staff and pupil toilet facilities and comments that class space would be lost if DDA compliant toilet facilities were to be created in the existing building. The lack of ventilation caused by windows which do not open was also noted as was the lack of space for pupil(s) who required specialist support outwith the class environment. Staff also commented on the lack of resources which a small school attracts and the impact that this has on the young person's educational experience. Comments also included the issue of falling pupil roll which, if continued, would lead to multi-composite classes from August 2008. Staff also felt that their own development was limited because of the small numbers of teachers at Sorn Primary.

4.11.3 Staff did, however, identify very positive aspects of Sorn Primary including the importance of the local environment which was of great assistance to the learning and teaching process. The small staff and pupil numbers was seen as a major advantage which created a family like atmosphere where all staff and pupils knew and respected each other. Staff also believe the school to be

an important factor in the local community, which provided an opportunity for parents to interact and foster good relations.

4.11.4 Letters were received separately from two staff members at Sorn Primary School, one of whom is also a parent. Both comment positively on the school and the area as an educational setting.

4.12 Responses from Staff at Primary Schools Affected

4.12.1 The Head Teacher of Catrine Primary wrote to assure Sorn parents that, if the children were to transfer to Catrine, they would be assured of the highest quality of education, stating that HMIE had expressed the view, in 2007, that a significant number of children attending Catrine Primary achieve above the standard expected.

4.13 Other Interested Individuals

4.13.1 A total of 229 standard e-mail responses was received which objected strongly to the closure proposals. Comments also asserted that Sorn Primary School is a successful school which delivers A Curriculum for Excellence very successfully and pointing out that closure would affect the social fabric of the Sorn community. The e-mails expressed support for the 'Save Sorn' campaign.

4.13.2 A total of 125 standard letters was received, objecting strongly to the proposal, praising the high standard of education at Sorn Primary School, claiming that the consultative paper was flawed, asserting that the school is central to the community and that its closure would adversely affect the whole village.

4.13.3 Further standard letters were received from 2 groups of 5 individuals. These responses indicate that the school is at the centre of the community. These letters state that Sorn Primary is a good school with no fighting, bullying or swearing. Correspondence also stresses the sense of belonging which children feel at Sorn and the fact that there is no vandalism, graffiti or anti-social behaviour associated with the school.

4.13.4 A further 45 letters and emails were received from individuals, either from the village or from people formerly associated with the village. For the avoidance of repetition, these are not summarised in detail because they make principally the same points as the Parent Council response and parental letters summarised above.

4.14 Other Interested Parties

4.14.1 The Parent Council of Mauchline Primary commented that transfer of Sorn pupils to Mauchline would put a strain on resources and space at Mauchline. However, children would be made welcome and would be fortunate to experience the standard of education that Mauchline children currently enjoy.

- 4.14.2 Dalrymple Primary School Parent Council were not in favour of the proposals, commenting that financial arguments were not sound, that the costs of transportation, costs related to unemployed staff and loss of rural schools grant would cancel out any savings. In addition, they argued that the closure of the school would remove the heart of the rural community.
- 4.14.3 Darvel Primary School Parent Council understood the feelings of those in communities whose schools were proposed for closure, but appreciated also the legal and financial implications. They were broadly supportive of the core principles underpinning the proposals.
- 4.14.4 Auchinleck Academy Parent Council acknowledged that the proposals were not intended as a criticism of the schools involved. The response recognised the need for renovations but considered the arguments presented by the Council to be over simplistic. They did not agree with the suggestion that children from a small, friendly school necessarily found it more difficult to move to secondary school. The biggest concern, their response suggested, was the impact on rural communities of removing the school.
- 4.14.5 Dalrymple Community Council believes that the proposal has generated an extreme depth of anger and feeling in the area, and refers to the SNP manifesto commitment on reducing class sizes. They state their support for the status quo.
- 4.14.6 Cumnock Academy's Senior Management Team was broadly supportive of the process, welcomed the fact that savings would accrue to the education budget and expressed the view that savings should be used for the benefit of all children in East Ayrshire schools. The response refrained from commenting on the specifics of any one proposal.

5. COMMENTS ON THE VIEWS EXPRESSED

- 5.1 The consultative process raised considerable interest and concerns amongst staff, parents, Parent Councils, community groups and other interested parties. The number of written responses and the level of attendance and questioning at meetings confirmed the important place that schools have in local communities. It is important to recognise that all meetings were held willingly by the Council and at no point did any interested party 'demand' a meeting as has been asserted. During the whole consultation, the real interest that parents and others have in the quality of education that their children receive and particularly the concerns that parents and others have over proposals for change to the existing arrangements were readily apparent.

During the consultation period a number of general issues were raised that relate to the proposals for this establishment and others that were identified as part of the "Better Schools: Better Learning" initiative. These general matters are considered in a separate report to Cabinet, namely, the nature and conduct of the consultation exercise, the accuracy of information, the basis of costs, GAE Funding, calculation of school capacities and roll projections.

5.2 The Educational Case

- 5.2.1 The point has been made repeatedly in responses that Sorn is an excellent school: children are high attaining, a strong positive ethos prevails, there is no bullying, parents choose to send their children to Sorn and the HMle inspection report confirms this. For reasons that are perhaps understandable, and despite the assurance to the contrary contained in the consultative document, some respondents have interpreted the proposal as a criticism of Sorn Primary School as a school. It is important to emphasise that criticism of the school, the pupils, the staff or the school community was neither intended nor implied. It is acknowledged that Sorn is an excellent school with a strong positive ethos and high attainment. Its children have performed and continue to perform to a very high standard. Parents and staff have every reason to feel proud of the pupils and of their contribution to the success of the school.

Nevertheless, the Council has a statutory responsibility to look to the future and plan accordingly. Perhaps, through exceptional effort and dedication and because of the high level of support from parents and the local community, the school will be able to maintain this level of performance into the future. On the other hand, they should not be achieving and attaining at such a creditable level in spite of the school environment, but because of it.

- 5.2.2 Many respondents have stated that no case has been made on educational grounds that pupils would benefit from this proposal. It has been claimed that it would lead to a drop in standards and that the buildings-related issues have been overstated. As laid out in the Consultation Document, the reason for the proposal is that the Council has a responsibility to provide the best possible educational environment and facilities for all children and Sorn Primary School

falls short of a 21st Century learning and teaching environment. Councils all over Scotland are in the process of regenerating their school estate, providing bright, attractive buildings designed for the delivery of the modern school curriculum, equipped with the aids to learning that all children deserve and it is desirable to do that in Sorn also.

In terms of the Government's injunction that any major change in the configuration of the school estate must be justified, first and foremost on educational grounds, the critical question is not whether the children of Sorn Primary School are performing better or less well than children at another school, but whether the Sorn children themselves, now and into the future, will perform better at Sorn or at one of the schools to which they might transfer if this proposal is approved.

The problem at Sorn is not just that the school needs upgrading but that the design of the building is not suitable for a modern school. Respondents have commented that the Council has claimed, on the one hand, that the building is under capacity and, on the other, that it is cramped. This apparent contradiction in fact accurately describes the situation. Children are currently provided with specialist teaching support in a corridor; the school's classroom assistant has her workstation in a corridor; there is no staffroom or resource base or many of the other features of a modern school.

Toilet facilities for pupils and staff are totally inadequate by modern standards. There is insufficient storage space in the school building which has led to metal storage containers being located in the rear playground. The condition of these containers means that educational resources are not kept in weather proof environments.

By contrast, new or refurbished schools typically have classrooms with modern furniture that can be used flexibly to enable children to work independently, in small groups or in larger groups with easy access to a variety of resources. Also available are multi-purpose rooms for activity based-learning; properly equipped gymnasias and dining halls; well designed storage; resource bases, staffroom and preparation areas for staff; modern toilets for staff and pupils; private offices for administration and meetings and for use by visiting specialists.

Fittings and equipment include work stations, improved ICT cabling and adequate power outlets, sufficient data points, interactive whiteboard technology and suspended ceilings for service ways. High quality lighting is provided, including emergency lighting and external lighting; fully automatic alarm systems; the installation of induction loops and attractive signage with built in daytime and out-of-hours security systems for the safety of all users.

Such buildings are compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and are therefore inclusive of all users. They are 'greener' and more energy efficient.

These features are not frills or window dressing. They have been incorporated as features of new and refurbished schools all over Scotland and beyond because educationists believe that they enhance the quality of young people's learning. The pupils and teachers in new and refurbished schools with these and similar features speak with enthusiasm and a sense of pride. These modern fit for purpose facilities, enhancing learning and teaching as they do, are available now in Mauchline Primary, and when refurbished in Catrine Primary also, albeit that current provision in Catrine exceeds that which is available in Sorn Primary.

- 5.2.3 Respondents point out that Sorn Primary School already delivers A Curriculum for Excellence, that small classes equals a better education and that there is no evidence to suggest any restriction in the breadth or depth of education which children experience. It is of note that there is no direct correlation between the size of a school and the size of a class; in larger schools pupils are not necessarily taught in larger groups as the staffing flexibility available there allows pupils to be taught in smaller groups depending on needs and circumstances. Learning is, therefore, able to be delivered in a more focused way. A Curriculum for Excellence lists the principles of curriculum design as being challenge and enjoyment, breadth, progression, depth, personalisation and choice, coherence and relevance. This is a demanding list. A Curriculum for Excellence also calls for learning to take place through a wide range of planned experiences, including environmental, scientific, technological, historical, social, economic, political, mathematical and linguistic contexts.

Teachers at Sorn Primary School do rise to this challenge, and the fact that classes are small will certainly help, but in the preparation of cross-curricular units that involve, for example a combination of skills and knowledge in science, music, PE, technology or modern languages for example, a larger staff will have more capacity for specialisation, in addition to which the individual teacher will not be required to provide this range of experiences for so many different groups of children, all in the one class.

Again, the important consideration for the authority in planning future school provision is not whether children's attainment is high at the moment, but whether the authority is doing all it can to support children's attainment and achievement, now and into the future. The Scottish Government clearly recognises that the values and principles of A Curriculum for Excellence are not dependent on structures, nor constrained by specific class sizes, and that it is for individual authorities to provide an enriched curriculum for pupils in order to maximise the educational benefits for pupils. Against this background, it is considered that in respect of Sorn Primary School this can be more effectively achieved through implementation of either option 2 or 3.

The issue of composite and multi-composite classes has been an important aspect of this consultation. In general terms, composite classes should neither advantage nor disadvantage children, as set out in the Council's 2007 Guide for Parents on Composite Classes in Primary Schools. However, the challenge for teachers, particularly in teaching multi composite classes, is to

plan, prepare and deliver materials appropriate to every child in the class. Within a single stream class children will be at different stages and in this respect every class is a composite class. In educational planning one of the most important concepts is “progression”, implying movement from one stage of learning to the next. In such a situation there is a balance between the reinforcement which comes from repeating work, and the lack of challenge that this can imply. Where children progress from one composite class to another there are clear challenges in terms of the richness of educational experience. These matters can be overcome with careful planning, but they do impose particular challenges in the system. In a multi-composite class, with children progressing at their own pace within each stage, the teacher’s job is correspondingly more challenging. At Sorn Primary School, teachers have been rising successfully to this challenge; however, it is neither appropriate nor educationally justifiable to require them to meet this challenge into the foreseeable future, when an alternative is available.

- 5.2.4 Respondents also take issue with the suggestion that resource management is more difficult in a small school. A composite or multi-composite class will include pupils at two or three different stages, each stage potentially containing pupils at different ability levels, so the challenge of offering a differentiated curriculum is multiplied by two or three in the first instance but in practice, to address the needs of individual children, by two or three times the number of ability groupings at each stage. This has implications for forward planning, lesson preparation, the management of teaching resources, assessment – pupil self assessment and peer group assessment – and the teaching process itself. Furthermore, since funding is allocated to schools principally on the basis of pupil numbers, head teachers in small schools have restricted flexibility and purchasing power.
- 5.2.5 It is claimed that no evidence has been presented that self and peer assessment depend for their effectiveness on interaction between pupils of similar age and stage. In small classes with pupils at different stages, the peer group is smaller requiring the same few children to work with one another every day, without the variety and stimulation of interaction within a larger peer group. Effective peer helping depends on interaction between peers, that is, children who are working at broadly the same standard and who share a level of understanding of the work. This is more readily available in larger schools such as Mauchline or Catrine than in Sorn.
- 5.2.6 Respondents reject the argument that children’s social development would benefit from going to a larger school, stating that the children of Sorn are happy, confident and socially well integrated and that they are well prepared for the transition to secondary school. There is no doubt that children at Sorn Primary School are fortunate in having access to a wide range of sporting and cultural experiences and activities, provided to the greatest extent and by other sources. The school has an excellent ethos and a family atmosphere in which every child can experience a sense of belonging and being cared for. However, it is not the case that a larger school is in any way less caring or that children cannot form close friendships or experience just as much of a sense of belonging. A larger school, by definition, if a similar proportion of

teachers and pupils are involved in the extra curricular life of the school, will offer a wide variety of different school based activities.

There is no significant difficulty in children moving from any East Ayrshire primary school to the associated secondary school. Staff work hard to ensure that children are made to feel welcome and settle in quickly to their new school. However, this is a very significant transition for young people and the same concerns apply as parents have noted in relation to the proposal that their children might move to a larger primary school. Some children thrive on the transition, others take longer to adjust. In any event, that same level of hard work by staff in a receiving primary school would be in place to ensure an easy and speedy transition for all Sorn pupils.

- 5.2.7 A small number of parents have alleged or inferred that the reason for sending their child to Sorn by placing request was to escape bullying in nearby schools. Several pupils in their responses have highlighted the absence of bullying as one of the things they really appreciate about Sorn Primary School. Some of the respondents have suggested that attempts to integrate the Sorn children in neighbouring schools would lead to bullying. All East Ayrshire schools take allegations of bullying very seriously indeed. In line with policies on anti-bullying, allegations are investigated and action taken as appropriate. Figures for Sorn, Mauchline and Catrine Primaries for the last three school years show no reported violent incidents. There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest that bullying is a problem at any of the schools included in this consultation. Bullying behaviour of one sort or another can, however, occur from time to time in all schools.

Staff vigilance and pastoral care structures in all schools are designed to ensure that the negative effects of bullying are kept to a minimum. When bullying does occur, staff and parents work together to support a child through the experience, to adjust and repair old friendships or form new ones.

- 5.2.8 Recruitment and retention of staff, respondents claim, has never been an issue at Sorn Primary. Cabinet will be aware that the Teachers' Agreement has introduced job sizing for promoted teachers, such that the head teacher of a small school can be placed on a lower salary than the depute head at a larger school, whilst carrying the full responsibility of being the head teacher. This has made the Head Teacher's job at a small school a less attractive career move. Recently, only one applicant responded to an advertisement for a particular position in one of our smaller schools, whilst another position required 2 re-advertisements to secure a minimum of 3 applicants. Indeed, the retention of head teachers has proved to be so difficult that some recruitment panels have been asked by some former school boards to consider the option of introducing longer term contracts for individual small schools.

As a consequence of this recruitment problem, the turnover of leadership within these schools can present some challenges in the delivery of continuity by teachers to pupils. Potential heads of small schools can be put off

applying by the need to combine day to day teaching with management and administration in such schools.

These features of smaller schools are both time consuming and expensive, even *more* so relative to the small number of pupils being served per advertisement and appointment. This is borne out in the “Leadership in Small Scottish Primary Schools” research paper (2007) commissioned and issued by the Scottish Government Social Research Unit; this paper concludes “successful leadership of small schools requires an ability to juggle a wide range of competing priorities with few colleagues or resources”.

In a school with a falling roll, any new member of staff will be aware that, at the point at which the decreasing roll requires the school to lose a member of staff, the teacher with least service will be most vulnerable to transfer. The Council’s task, in looking to the future, is to consider whether these factors taken together with the fact that Sorn is an old school, designed for 19th century education, in a rapidly changing educational landscape will continue to be seen as an attractive career move for teachers and aspirant head teachers.

5.3 Travel Distances and Times

5.3.1 In response to the consultation responses on safety and travel distances the Council recognises the following. Sorn Primary School is located on the Main Street which passes through Sorn. Speed reduction measures are already in place to ensure that vehicles in the vicinity of the school have to lower their speed. It is also accepted that due to the local populations and pupil rolls that traffic volume is lower at Sorn Primary than either Catrine or Mauchline Primaries.

5.3.2 Colleagues from Roads and Transportation have commented on the historic issue of traffic congestion in the vicinity of Catrine Primary, particularly on John Street and Fourfields. There are, however, proposals to improve this in conjunction with a planned housing development. A transport assessment was prepared for the reopening of Mauchline Primary School and the results are now incorporated into significantly improved traffic management in and around the school. It is clear, therefore, that the Council recognises its responsibilities and has taken or has planned appropriate responsive action on road safety.

5.3.3 An exercise was undertaken to calculate the home to school distances for all 71 pupils, for each of the three options. Of the children attending Sorn Primary 36 are not on placing requests and live in the catchment area. 22 of these children stay within 1 mile of the school. Only 3 children all of whom are on placing requests stay more than 5 miles from the school. The cumulative total distances travelled/to be travelled daily by all 71 pupils are detailed below :-

- Option 1 (Status Quo) 159 miles
- Option 2 (Catrine) 192 miles

- Option 3 (Mauchline) 296 miles

In relation to options 2 and 3, the 22 children living in the 1 mile radius of Sorn Primary and the balance of 14 (of 36) who are not on placing requests and live in the catchment area would be entitled to free transport thus addressing distances, travel times, safety and impact on extra curricular activity. While the school day would be lengthened for this number, it is to be noted that as Catrine Primary is 2.29 miles and Mauchline Primary 3.84 miles from Sorn Primary, the consequent addition to the day would at most be 30 minutes.

5.4 Future Pupil and Population Projections

- 5.4.1 Several respondents have pointed to the high number of placing requests to Sorn Primary School as evidence both of the popularity and future sustainability of the school. The number of inward placing requests is indeed evidence that Sorn is a popular school. However, in planning for the future configuration of its school estate, East Ayrshire Council would not be justified in factoring in placing requests as a reason for providing additional school places. The argument that the closure of the school would remove an element of choice from parents, who might choose the small rural school option for their children, is an understandable one. However, it has to be counterbalanced against the need to look dispassionately at existing provision and plan for efficient educational provision, keeping in mind best value, for children according to population trends and projections.
- 5.4.2 The school population within East Ayrshire has been steadily declining over recent years. This will, therefore, lead to a decline in the school roll of Sorn Primary and is one of the reasons that the consultation proposals were brought forward.
- 5.4.3 During the consultation process it was explained that roll projections could never be a precise science; however, the data presented was the best possible projection taking into account factors such as falling national birth rates and projected housing developments.

Further work has been undertaken to provide an updated position. This work has involved close liaison with officers from Planning and has allowed for a close examination of the impact of new housing developments.

- 5.4.4 The original consultative document pointed out some of the issues in interpreting school rolls. In projecting school rolls, account has been taken of known housing developments and an estimate of placing requests based on past history. The birth rate that has been applied is higher than the anticipated rates and the figures are therefore more likely to overestimate the school roll than underestimate it.

SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL (Planning Capacity 101)										
Year	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total	Housing (new pupils)	Total
Sept 2007	3	7	7	11	7	19	13	67	0	67
Sept 2008	5	3	7	7	11	7	19	59	4	63
Sept 2009	5	5	3	7	7	11	7	45	3	48
Sept 2010	5	5	5	3	7	7	11	43	1	44
Sept 2011	4	5	5	5	3	7	7	36	2	38
Sept 2012	4	4	5	5	5	3	7	33	3	36
Sept 2013	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	30	3	33
Sept 2014	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	31	4	35
Sept 2015	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	30	5	35

MAUCLINE PRIMARY SCHOOL (Planning Capacity 480)										
Year	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total	Housing (new pupils)	Total
Sept 2007	39	40	34	43	59	53	44	312	0	312
Sept 2008	40	39	40	34	43	59	53	308	4	312
Sept 2009	41	40	39	40	34	43	59	296	7	303
Sept 2010	40	41	40	39	40	34	43	277	12	289
Sept 2011	41	40	41	40	39	40	34	275	21	296
Sept 2012	40	41	40	41	40	39	40	281	29	310
Sept 2013	40	40	41	40	41	40	39	281	40	321
Sept 2014	39	40	40	41	40	41	40	281	50	331
Sept 2015	38	39	40	40	41	40	41	279	60	339

CATRINE PRIMARY SCHOOL (Planning Capacity 231)										
Year	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total	Housing (new pupils)	Total
Sept 2007	13	18	17	16	19	13	20	116	0	116
Sept 2008	23	13	18	17	16	19	13	119	4	123
Sept 2009	17	23	13	18	17	16	19	123	10	133
Sept 2010	16	17	23	13	18	17	16	120	17	137
Sept 2011	16	16	17	23	13	18	17	120	24	144
Sept 2012	16	16	16	17	23	13	18	119	32	151
Sept 2013	16	16	16	16	17	23	13	117	40	147
Sept 2014	16	16	16	16	16	17	23	120	45	165
Sept 2015	16	16	16	16	16	16	17	113	40	153

5.4.5 The tables above take account of new pupils likely to attend the 3 schools as a result of housing development in their respective areas as identified in the finalised Draft Alteration to the Local Plan. If either option 2 or option 3 was to be adopted, it can be seen that at September 2015, both Catrine or Mauchline would leave sufficient capacity to accommodate the projected school roll for Sorn (35).

5.5 Community Planning and Use

5.5.1 Policy Context

The Community Plan is recognised by all Community Planning Partners as the sovereign strategic planning document for the delivery of public services in East Ayrshire over the 12 years from 2003 to 2015 and sets out the overall vision for the local area, which clearly articulates that we are committed to achieving “high quality services which are sustainable, accessible and meet people’s needs”. Recognising the principle of ‘One Council, One Plan’, the Council has adopted the Community Plan as its Corporate Plan.

Consequently, all activity and decisions around major issues, such as those emerging from Better Schools: Better Learning, are informed by the priorities articulated in the Community Plan, under the six identified themes.

- Promoting Community Learning
- Improving Opportunities

- Improving Community Safety
- Improving Health
- Eliminating Poverty
- Improving the Environment

The commitment of the Council's Partners, namely NHS Ayrshire and Arran, Strathclyde Police, Strathclyde Fire and Rescue, Scottish Enterprise Ayrshire and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), to the Community Planning process ensures that they are involved, as appropriate, in the consideration of major issues. In this respect the East Ayrshire Community Planning Core Partners Group (now the Community Planning and Partnership Board), the most senior decision making body of the partnership, on 11 December 2007, received and discussed the Better Schools: Better Learning consultation documents and agreed to participate in the formal public consultation. Since then, SPT, for example, has been involved in determining the transport implications of potential decisions emerging from Better Schools: Better Learning and Strathclyde Police has been involved in addressing parental concerns around the safety of their children.

5.5.2 Promoting Community Learning

Importantly, the use of fewer but larger establishments with a wider range of facilities will bring young people, parents and families into contact with a range of facilities and community resources that may not have been present at their original school. In some cases, these facilities will be a considerable improvement on those that existed in the original establishment. A concentration of resources will allow the more efficient use of:

- Bilingual support services
- Learning support services
- Quality improvement services
- Educational psychology services
- A visual impairment peripatetic service
- A hearing impairment service
- Educational audiology services
- Technician services
- ICT support

Community learning is about people of all ages and all sections of the community having access to learning throughout their lives, and includes family learning and activities for young people such as peer education. This learning will continue in community facilities across the area and any potential impact resulting from the review of school establishments will be considered.

It is recognised that schools are one of the main outlets for information on community learning and other activities and effective established links between schools and parents through pupils and other mechanisms will limit any impact in this regard. In addition, other effective mechanisms, including mobile resources, such as libraries, and the Council and Community Planning

websites, can be utilised to ensure that communities have access to a wide range of information.

While a reduction in school premises will limit the number of facilities available to local communities, this need not mean a reduction in service but rather requires that the use of remaining facilities, such as village halls and mobile resources, be maximised. In the case of Sorn, the Council has already been working with the Community Council to ensure the long term viability of the Old Person's Cabin by seeking to bring it into community management. Equally, the Council will seek to work across the community with groups to bring together services and maximise the potential of Sorn as a community. Reference is made elsewhere to specific examples as to how this might be achieved (see Rural Sustainability).

5.5.3 Improving Opportunities

Raising educational achievement and ensuring that our children and young people get the best start in life are key priorities for the Council and its Community Planning Partners. Allied to this, Partners are committed to promoting and assisting the development of early education and childcare, which supports children and their families and helps parents balance family life with work, training and education. The number and range of available childcare places has increased significantly, and we will continue to support the development of innovative childcare solutions and the sustainability of new and existing services, including the after school club in Sorn.

While it is recognised that any reduction of the school estate will inevitably reduce the number of jobs available particularly for headteachers and ancillary staff, the principal reduction in cost drivers from any rationalisation, our focus must be on the children and young people. Larger schools are able to provide a wider variety of accommodation and staff skills and the potential for children to be brought into contact with new experiences, ideas and environments is significantly increased. Larger schools have more resources and can, therefore, increase the range of opportunities for children. This is particularly true where there is an element of co-location, as with a nursery class, additional support needs base, and other establishments nearby, access to community facilities such as community centres, games halls, libraries, shops, churches. The Council has a responsibility to provide the best possible educational environment and facilities for all children, therefore, this wider range of opportunities and choices for children and young people offsets the reduction in the choice of establishments.

Whilst there could be a reduction in the distribution of Council, or publicly funded jobs throughout the council area, which may have a secondary effect in terms of the local economy, particularly where a school is in the centre of a village and school staff use local facilities and shops, the Council will work proactively with local businesses to ameliorate the effect. This, however, is balanced by the fact that the concentration of resources in other sites will improve their economic viability and will potentially strengthen local economies at schools that are increased in size.

Key to facilitating access and, in this case, minimising the impact of transferring to schools in other communities is the provision of good transport solutions. In this regard, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport has been involved, as appropriate, in advising on transport issues. In addition, there is a potential role for Coalfield Community Transport (CCT) in providing a local solution to transport issues, building on the current good practice between the Council and CCT.

5.5.4 Improving Community Safety

Emerging from the consultation, some of the main issues of concern to parents relate to fears of bullying or problems in the community in larger settlements to which the children may move. Community Planning Partners are committed to creating safe places to live, work and play for people of all ages. Consequently, addressing the fears of parents will always be a priority.

Bullying can occur in any school, whatever the size. The Authority has a clear policy on bullying, which is routinely reviewed and revised, and schools have effective mechanisms to deal with issues as they arise. There is strong evidence that approaches, such as Circle Time and Restorative Practices, which are now widely adopted, make significant contributions to tackling bullying and other issues of behaviour. In addition, the links between schools and Community Police Officers can be utilised and, the 'Campus Cops' initiative recently launched at a number of secondary schools including Auchlinleck, with its links to associated primary schools has a role to play in promoting positive behaviour.

Parents very often express concerns at the prospect of children being educated in another community. Such views are often based on misplaced perceptions of other villages or town zones. In the past, when schools have been merged and such fears have been expressed, they have not been realised in practice. The best and clearest example of children from a variety of communities mixing without problems is in the denominational sector where children from a wide range of often distant communities mix with minimal problems. In addition, community based staff such as Community Link Workers and Youth Workers play a vital role in positively bridging school and community.

Relationships with partner agencies, particularly the Police, social work and the NHS, on such matters, including child protection, are strong and well established, and any emerging issues will be addressed in partnership. Again, concentration into fewer units is likely to significantly strengthen this work and these partnerships.

5.5.5 Improving Health

There are very strong working relationships with clinical services, including:

- a school nurse in each learning partnership;

- services of a staff grade paediatrician (school doctors);
- school dental services;
- dietician services; and
- speech and language therapy services.

Rationalisation of school establishments will have no negative implications for these services but will, in fact, further support delivery as there will be fewer establishments to service. From a health perspective, integration aids working arrangements from a practical point of view. Indeed, Mauchline has a specialist medical (MI) room allowing privacy and provision of proper facilities. The implementation of screening and, as necessary, vaccination programmes, will be easier in larger establishments. In addition, as with education staff, travelling times for health related staff are reduced leaving more time for direct contact with children and young people.

The promotion of physical activity is promoted in all schools through the Recreation Partnership Project and Health Activity Motivators. These provide a dynamic and innovative approach to engaging children in health related activities. Children are provided with a range of opportunities to become more active more often and to increase their knowledge and understanding and awareness of a range of factors which contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Access to this programme, which has resulted in the activity ratings of children in East Ayrshire being twice the national targets as reported by the Chief Medical Officer, will continue and may be enhanced by better facilities in bigger or more modern schools.

5.5.6 Eliminating Poverty

Poverty is not only about a lack of financial resources but also about the lack of opportunities and choices. A major factor in addressing these issues is the provision of high quality learning in the best possible environment. As previously stated, fewer larger establishments with a wider range of facilities will bring children and young people, parents and families into contact with a range of facilities and community resources that may not have been present at their original school, including educational, learning and health resources, increasing the opportunities and choices available to them.

In addition, recognising the access issues occasioned by the rural nature of the south of the Authority, there has been considerable investment in mobile resources providing a wide range of services within communities, including:

- CHIP Van (mobile healthy living initiative);
- Libraries (bringing not only the traditional services but also information, ICT and learning resources);

The SHOUT Card, developed by the Recreation Partnership Project, is available free to all children aged 5-12 years and allows them to access a wide range of services and activities in their communities and the surrounding area either free of charge or at a reduced rate.

5.5.7 Improving the Environment

The Finalised Draft Alteration to the Local Plan states -

“The village of Sorn, population 239 in 2001, is a picturesque village containing a number of listed buildings and two conservation areas, one comprising the main village area, the other, a rural conservation area based on Sorn Castle. Proud of its appearance, Sorn is a regular winner of the Beautiful Scotland, Britain in Bloom, Entente Florale and International Communities in Bloom competitions.

There is a small, but steady, demand for new housing within the village and Sorn is identified in the Replacement Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan as a local community with small scale development opportunities. Sufficient housing land has been identified in the local plan to accommodate a limited level of residential development which reflects and is commensurate with this designation. Care has also been taken to ensure that future development is in keeping with the size, scale and character of the community.

A greenfield site within the settlement at New Mill has recently been developed for residential purposes and an additional greenfield site at Catrine Road has been allocated in the plan to help meet anticipated housing requirements in the community.

The village is served by a local shop / Post Office meeting the day to day needs of the local community and there is a small but limited range of formal community facilities in the settlement comprising Sorn Primary School and Sorn Village Hall. Outdoor public sporting, leisure and recreational facilities comprise the recreation ground and its associated playing field along the Muirkirk Road and a small area of maintained amenity open space adjacent to the bowling green on Main Street. Private sporting, leisure and recreational facilities comprise Sorn Bowling Green.

Sorn is, in general, adequately supplied in terms of leisure activities for all ages and abilities proportionate to its size and proximity to other settlements. However, the area would benefit from:

- the provision of a new sports pavilion.

It is intended that Developer Contributions will be specifically directed towards funding this particular initiative.

SORN DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Residential development of the following sites will be supported by the Council:

Site Ref	Location	Capacity Area (ha)
(i) 057H*	Catrine Road	

* New Greenfield Release

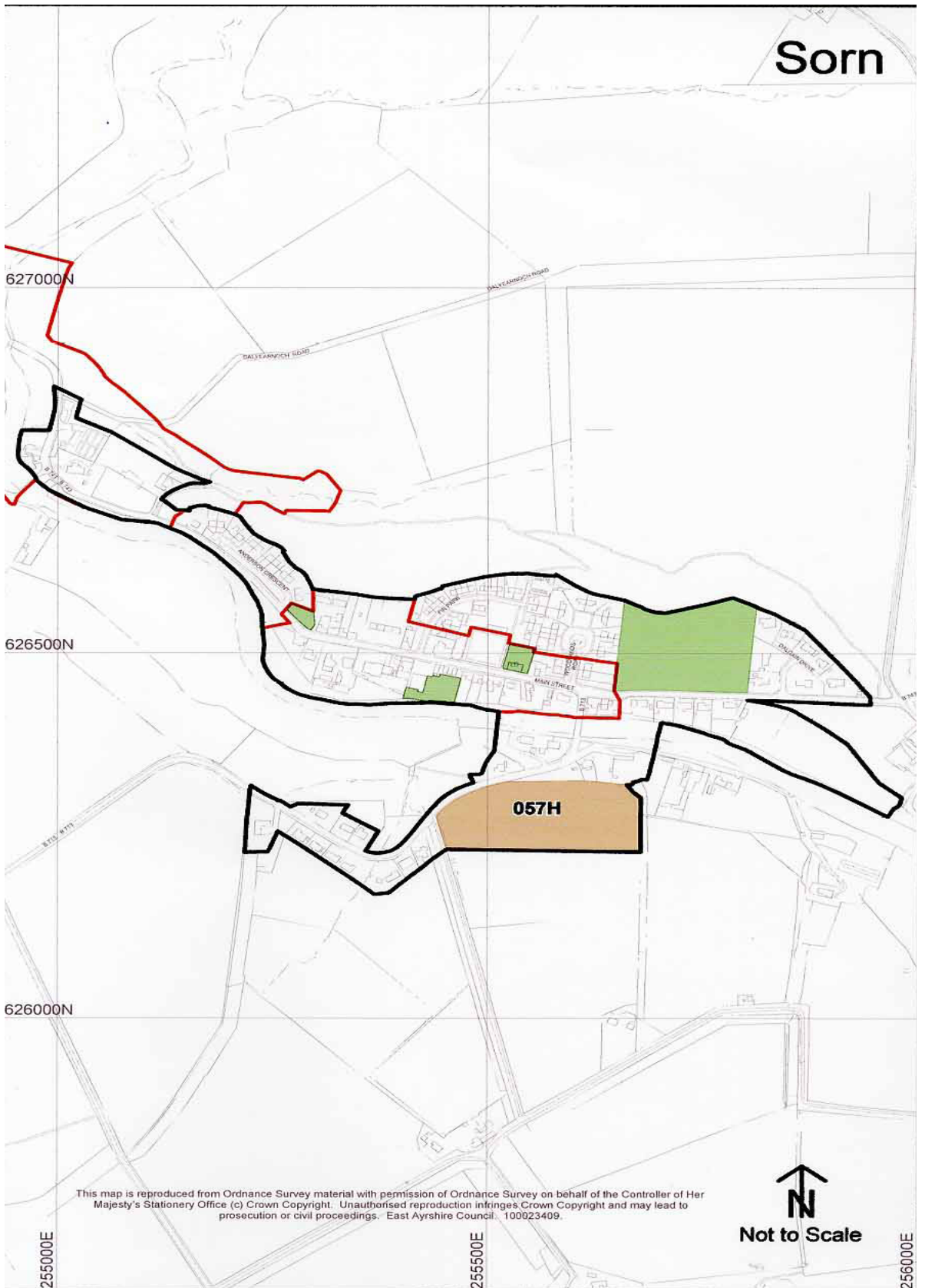
Note: The Council will require any developer of site 057H to submit a Transport Assessment in respect of any detailed development proposals for the site, identifying the transport effects of the proposal and the sustainable transport measures to be introduced to cater for the travel needs associated with the development.”

Having regard to the above policy position which describes the Council’s absolute commitment to the future of Sorn, sustainable development means meeting the current needs of citizens without compromising the future. Although the term is often used in relation to physical development and protecting the environment; it is more than this. It is about achieving a balance between the environmental social and economic needs of our communities and the long term affects of what we do. The rural environment is changing and diversifying and rural sustainability does not mean that every service/facility requires to be available in every community. It is more about ensuring good access to facilities and services and promoting the use of our Coalfield Community Transport does that well and its use will/can be extended to cover additional areas.

Promoting a lasting pattern of development within the Improving the Environment theme is achieved through the planning process. Again a balance has to be struck between urban and rural and the hierarchy of development concentrates new development in areas where there are appropriate services with provision for enhanced facilities and infra structure through development contributions.

Sorn has only one shop/post office and the village hall. Outdoor facilities comprise the recreation ground and playing fields and a bowling club. Mauchline is defined as a strategic location with significant development opportunities in the Structure Plan and has a wide range of shops, a health centre, community centre, games hall, library and the Burns Museum with outdoor facilities at Beechwood Park. Catrine has a range of local shops, a games hall, health clinic local office, public hall and library, youth centre and there is an outdoor playing field.

Draft local plan – community map



5.6 Rural Sustainability and Development

5.6.1 Policy Context

At the strategic level, the Ayrshire Joint Structure Plan, approved in November 2007, has adopted the concept of Sustainable Development as one of its primary Guiding Principles. It is seen as not just a concept about the environment but about economic growth and social development, and about the type of society in which we wish to live.

A number of the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development detailed in the Structure Plan relate to Community Regeneration. In particular, the plan recognises that special needs exist within rural communities and that integrated action is necessary, amongst other things, to address social issues. It is recognised that many of these issues, including education provision, would require to be addressed through the community planning / local planning process.

At the local level, the finalised version of the East Ayrshire Local Plan Alteration (referred to in an earlier section) has been prepared to fully conform with the Ayrshire Structure Plan and has adopted a single primary strategic aim which is 'to promote sustainable development, to maximise the economic potential of East Ayrshire and to improve the quality of life of its residents'. This aim is, in turn, reinforced by a number of more specific aims including aim 2 'to maintain and improve the integrity, vitality and viability of the area settlements and their rural settings' and aim 8 'to promote appropriate development in rural areas'. The plan aims are implemented through a General Development Strategy which among other priorities 'encourages appropriate and sympathetic development which contributes positively to rural and farm diversification throughout the rural area'.

More specifically in relation to community facilities and service infrastructure the plan 'presumes against the loss of important community, education, leisure and recreational facilities to other uses' but recognises that this must be balanced against the need to 'ensure the highest possible level and quality of community facility, education ... provision throughout East Ayrshire to meet existing and anticipated future demand requirements of the local population' (paragraph 5.70, Volume 1).

Proposal PROP 8 of the finalised local plan alteration is pertinent to this approach, stating:

'The Council will, subject to the necessary finance being available, improve and enhance existing community, educational, leisure, recreational and sporting facilities for which it is responsible, both in the area settlements and throughout the rural area. Consideration will be given to the provision of new, expanded or additional facilities where there is a demonstrated need and where finances permit'.

In addition to the above proposal, the Council requires housing developers to make a positive contribution towards the expansion of education provision, throughout both the area settlements and the rural area, to meet the needs of incoming populations living in their developments.

5.6.2 Role of school in community

(i) School lets

In the last three calendar years 24 lets of the premises have been ordered. All have been by the Head Teacher and have been for either parents' evenings or School Board / Parent Council meetings. There have been no occasions of members of the community using the school for community functions.

(ii) Facilities offered to community

As evidenced in Section 1 of this report accommodation is limited to 4 classrooms. The previous paragraph highlights that there have been no facilities within the school which have been used by the community.

(iii) Use of local facilities by school

Respondents claim that the school provides the village hall with 70% of its income and that the After School Care club for a further 20%. They argue that the sustainability of the hall would be at risk if the school closed. The village hall provides premises for the Toddlers' Group; the Women's Rural Institute; a youth group; an old folks' group; After School Care; sports activities and other village 'events'. In fact during calendar year 2006 the school provided £4,567.50 towards the village hall's running costs. In addition Leisure Services contributed £112 for the summer club held in the hall. The Village Hall annual accounts for 2006 identify expenditure of £13,089. Therefore the total Council contribution to the running costs equates to 35.76% and not the 70% quoted in responses.

The Council recognises the importance of the village hall to the community of Sorn and particularly should the decision of Cabinet be to close the Primary School. The Council, therefore, commits in these circumstances to work closely with the village hall committee, community groups and the wider community to ensure its key role in the viability and sustainability of Sorn.

(iv) Contribution of school to local economy

A number of the children from Sorn Primary attend the After School Club which is run by the Sorn Educational Trust (SET). This activity directly supports 3 qualified support workers and claims to provide a service to 28 families. The Trust contributes approximately 20% towards the village hall's operational costs.

Members of the school and village community have stressed the important role that the school plays in village life. There is no doubt, from the responses

received, that the primary school, together with the nearby village hall, is seen as an important hub and focal point for the village of Sorn. The relationship between the village and the school is very close. Children are involved in a variety of all-village events and activities. Individuals and groups within the village organise a wide range of events for young people from Sorn and the surrounding area. For example, the village supports no fewer than 11 football teams.

5.6.3 Village Life

- (i) Respondents maintained that the village has lost or is at risk of losing other facilities. Some respondents claim that the consultation proposals come on the back of the closure of the village's public toilets. However the toilets were, in fact, closed many years ago since they did not meet modern standards and did not meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- (ii) Submissions also comment on the plans to close the Old Persons Cabin and that a consultation is proposed on the future of the Post Office. As stated above, the Council continues to work with the Community Council in bringing the Old Persons Cabin under community management. Also the Council contributes a significant proportion of the village hall's income (35.76%) but clearly it is not the majority of it. However, it is important to recognise that the vitality and economic viability of Sorn is not simply about Community facilities. For example the Council, with Partners, opened the River Ayr Way in 2006, bringing to the area 50,000 visitors in the first year, many of whom have also enjoyed the village and its amenities including the Sorn Inn and the post office/general shop. Tourism, therefore, has a vital role in the future sustainability of the community. With an increased number of private housing planned, as described above, and with the Council's commitment to increase the proportion of available affordable housing across East Ayrshire, the future for communities such as Sorn, is very positive. It is worthy of note, that despite the comments, no consultation has yet begun which includes Sorn Post Office.

5.7 Urban Communities and Regeneration

- 5.7.1 Given the size and nature of the community of Sorn, it is considered that it is rural and not urban in nature and so all relevant comments on sustainability and regeneration can be found elsewhere and in particular at paragraph 5.6 above.

5.8 Financial Considerations

- 5.8.1 Respondents have expressed concern that investment in Sorn Primary School has been so low over the years and some have interpreted this as "a programme of calculated neglect". In common with the majority of schools in Scotland, Sorn Primary School has suffered from decades of inadequate maintenance. This is due, not to negligence on the Council's part or an

unwillingness to invest in Sorn, but to the inadequacy of capital funding available to all councils for the upkeep of schools and other council properties.

5.8.2 The investment initiatives favoured by the former Scottish Executive enabled the Council, for the first time in many decades, to invest significantly to improve the condition of its school estate. The Building Learning Partnerships addressed the replacement and refurbishment of the school buildings which were in the worst condition. This work has freed up capital funding to address other issues within the school estate but unfortunately this will not extend to like for like replacement of all schools.

5.8.3 Some responses have taken issue with the costs estimated for building works at Sorn, claiming that the work could be carried out much more cheaply. As a result of a survey carried out in 2008 to ensure that reinstatement costs for the school building were expressed in 2008 values, these costs have been re-estimated at £680,000. This would enable essential maintenance to be carried out including rewiring, toilet upgrades, roofing works, window replacement, accessibility upgrading and a range of other capital works. However, it would not address any of the concerns regarding the design of the building, the use of space, the unsuitability of the building as a modern school, the need for improved technology or a range of other facilities that children in new and refurbished schools enjoy. The paragraphs below provide further detail on financial issues.

5.8.4 Revenue

In financial year 2006/07 the total net direct spend for Sorn Primary School was £298,171. This can be broken down as follows :-

	£
Employee Costs	225,096
Teachers' Costs	27,920
Ancillary Staff	
Property Costs	23,410
Transport Costs	2,045
Supplies	28,198
School Meal Income	<u>(8,498)</u>
	<u>298,171</u>

Based on 2007/08 prices the following revenue savings, including janitation and cleaning costs, have been calculated for each of the options within the consultation document :-

Option 2 :

REVENUE SAVINGS (SORN TO CATRINE)			
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3 Onwards
	£	£	£
Employee Costs	10,400	10,400	91,400
Property Costs	8,700	8,700	8,700
Supplies and Admin Costs	7,400	7,400	7,400
On Site Services	23,200	23,200	23,200
Transport Costs (based on average cost)	(31,300)	(31,300)	(31,300)
TOTAL	18,400	18,400	99,400

Option 3 :

REVENUE SAVINGS (SORN TO MAUCLINE)			
	£	£	£
Employee Costs	10,600	10,600	91,600
Property Costs	9,800	9,800	9,800
Supplies and Admin Costs	7,500	7,500	7,500
On Site Services	23,200	23,200	23,200
Transport Costs (based on average cost)	(31,300)	(31,300)	(31,300)
TOTAL	19,800	19,800	100,800

Should either option 2 or 3 be accepted by Cabinet it would result in savings of £18,400 and £19,800 respectively for the first two years. Under the Council procedures additional staffing may be allocated to the receiving school to assist with the learning and teaching process during the first two academic sessions following the mergers. From Year 3 onwards the revenue savings of options 2 and 3 would generate direct savings to the Education Service of £99,400 and £100,800 respectively. In addition to these school savings the corporate ICT network costs will be reduced by approximately £3,000 per annum.

The figures take account of additional transport costs of £31,300 as estimated by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) for pupils residing within the Sorn Primary catchment area. It should be noted that 35 children attend Sorn Primary on a placing request. The parents of these children would continue to be responsible for their transport to and from school. These proposals would not change this unless any revised catchment area overlapped with the zone of entitlement to free transport under the Council's policies.

At its meeting of 7 November 2007, Cabinet gave a commitment that all annual revenue savings would be reinvested directly in the education services.

5.8.5 Capital Issues

At its meeting of 7 November 2007, Cabinet gave a commitment that all capital savings and receipts would be reinvested directly in the education services and learning and teaching.

5.8.6 During week commencing 4 February 2008 all schools involved in the Better Schools: Better Learning initiative were visited by officers of Technical Services and the Department of Educational and Social Services and re-surveyed regarding any property related issues. The results of that survey indicated that costs of £680,000 were required to bring the building to an acceptable standard. Should either option 2 or 3 be accepted the Council would not need to incur the capital cost required to bring Sorn Primary School upto a standard which meets the Council's aspirations for its educational establishments.

5.9 Other Alternatives

5.9.1 Four suggestions were made within the Sorn Educational Trust's (SET) response about how the school could be upgraded or replaced with a joint venture between the Sorn community and East Ayrshire Council. These are as follows:-

- Land owners may potentially donate ground for a new school build at no cost to the Council in return for the granting of planning permission for new housing. SET claim that discussion with landowners have been very positive; however, the Council has not been party to these discussions nor has it been approached by any individual in this respect. There may be issues in relation to the Local Plan as only one area in Sorn has been identified for residential development.
- SET have suggested that the current school ground and buildings be sold for residential development and believe that this would contribute approximately £200,000 towards the cost of a new build school. It is unclear how this sum has been estimated and there is no further information on how the remainder of the required capital would be raised.
- A further suggested would be to merge Catrine Nursery School into Catrine Primary. SET claim that this could raise between £800,000 and £1,000,000. As with the previous alternative no evidence has been produced to confirm these figures and it is highly likely that the residents of Catrine, provided they agreed to such a proposal in a public consultation, would expect any capital receipt to be reinvested into Catrine Primary School.
- SET have also suggested that the community form a Trust which would raise the funding to build a new school and subsequently lease it to the Council. There is no detailed evidence on how this Trust could attract a contribution of central Government and private financing. Nor is there any

evidence provided to detail how the Council could achieve value for money through this approach.

Given the lack of specification in the above alternative proposals it has not been possible to make any realistic assessment of the viability of the proposals at this stage.

Whilst these are potentially interesting suggestions, the level of detail provided does not allow any proper consideration to be given to all or any of them. Accordingly there is considered to be no convincing case for any of them to be considered as alternative options at this stage. In particular, they do not take account of the projected decline in the school roll or contain any breakdown of initial and ongoing capital and revenue costs. Indeed, the estimated costs provided (£1.2m, although this does not include sports pitches) of a replacement school are considered to be extremely low for anything but the most basic provision and this would not be the quality of provision the Council would wish to deliver. It is also of note that under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, the Council would be required to build a school for only the catchment area based on the forecasted population – 35 pupils at 2015.

- 5.9.2 In addition, in an urban/rural mix area, such as East Ayrshire, Sorn is like a number of other villages/communities – it has its own identity which it fiercely defends. The Council is committed to retaining this but sees other ways of doing so, as described above, rather than by the retention of the existing poor learning and teaching environment.

5.10 Unique Local Factors

- 5.10.1 The Sorn community has mounted a very well organised campaign for the retention of its school, which has been a feature of the village for 150 years.

The obvious pride in its school and the unanimity of the Sorn community in this matter is appreciated but it is not unique. A strong commitment exists within the Council to continue to work in partnership with the Sorn community, the staff of Sorn Primary School and their Parent Council in the development of future educational provision for their children. This commitment is equally strong in each school area and so, East Ayrshire Council will ensure that the appropriate arrangements exist to take this forward.

- 5.10.3 It is noted that the Parent Council response rejected the consultation on the grounds that no local input was sought before the document was written. It is also claimed that the Consultation Document contained spurious, inaccurate and misleading data.

However, the document itself is the mechanism for seeking local input in terms of the Education (Publications and Consultations etc) (Scotland) Regulations 1981 and Amendment Regulations 1987, 1988 and 1989 and 2007. The purpose of the consultation is to enable all interested parties to make their views known and also to uncover evidence or issues which

Cabinet Members should take account of in reaching their decision. There have, however, been no unique local factors or indeed emerging issues not previously considered and which would lead to an alternative recommendation.

6. CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM ROLE IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Throughout the consultation process there have been full and regular discussions at the highest level of Officer Management of the Council. The results of these discussions are incorporated into the text of this paper and address all educational and non-educational issues raised in and by the consultative document. The following points identify where joint working within the Council has taken place throughout the process :-

- The recent re-survey work on the Sorn Primary has been carried out in conjunction with officers from Technical Services;
- Legal Services have provided specific comments on relevant factors;
- Finance Services have audited and confirmed the potential revenue savings;
- The Community Planning Partnerships Unit have provided specific comment in the body of each Cabinet report;
- Roads have provided estimates of the pupil travelling distances, and professional road safety advice for each of the options listed in the Consultation Documents;
- Planning Services have been involved in the preparation of future pupil rolls, providing data on new housing developments which have been built into the Local Plan.

The outcome of all this involvement and more is a set of recommendations by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services supported by the Corporate Management Team.

7. THE COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The forgoing subsections of paragraph 5 above detail the Council's considerations of all issues as originally defined in the consultation documents and importantly, all of these, both educational and non-educational raised through the detailed consultation responses. The Council allocated well beyond the statutory minimum (28 days) consultation period for responses (giving 54 days) in recognition of the significance with which the intended parties/stakeholders regard this matter.
- 7.2 Of the 559 responses, some very detailed, no issue raised remains unaddressed and so Cabinet has before it in this paper, full and detailed arguments for and against the options (1, 2 and 3) as set out for consultation.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Any reduction in the property portfolio will reduce the risk to which the Council is exposed in terms of issues such as infrastructure failure, vandalism and threats to security. Any property that is vacated, however, is likely to be exposed to an increased level of risk requiring additional security measures.

9. LEGAL ISSUES

- 9.1 By virtue of s22 (1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 the Council may discontinue or change the site of, any educational establishment under its management. However prior to any such decision the Council is required to consult in terms of the Education (Publication and Consultation etc. (Scotland) Regulations 1981 which consultation forms the subject matter of this report. It is a legal requirement that the Council shall not reach any decision without having regard to any representations made in response to the consultation. Consequently members require to consider the consultation representations fairly.
- 9.2 As provided for in s1 of the 1980 Act it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within East Ayrshire such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000 s2). That said, as with all Council duties, the Council has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 s1). In coming to any decision members should balance the foregoing duties.
- 9.3 Article 2 of the first protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into domestic law by the Human Rights Act 1998 provides that "No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions" The principle in the second sentence is accepted into UK law only so far as it is compatible with the provisions of efficient instruction and training, and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure. The right to education is a general right and the relevant provisions of the 1980 Act and the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc (Scotland) Act 2000 go beyond what is required by the provision in the first protocol. Accordingly provided members comply with the aforementioned duties a successful Human Rights challenge to a properly considered decision is most unlikely.
- 9.4 Extremely useful guidance on how Council's should handle decisions relating to the School Estate ("Additional Guidance on Local Authority Proposals for the School Estate, Including School Closures) was issued by the Scottish Executive in 2004 and reissued again last year. The guidance has been taken into account in the drafting of this report however it is also recommended that members familiarise themselves with the guidance. It would be too simplistic to attempt to summarise the guidance which is to be read as a whole but some of the principle issues are the following. A number of possible relevant factors are identified in the guidance which the Council must have regard to but in the event of a decision being finely balanced, the quality of education provided to pupils, locally and more widely, now and in the future, will

normally be the overarching consideration. Consequently this report outlines, and members must consider, the educational advantages of the proposal. Indeed the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has indicated that in cases which are referred to the Scottish Government for consent she will be asking HMIE for advice on the case presented and on the envisaged educational advantages the proposal is intended to secure. Further the educational advantages must be both local and on the wider scale.

- 9.5 By virtue of the said 1981 regulations any proposal which would result in primary pupils having to attend an alternative school 5 or more miles distant from their current school or where the school's role is greater than 80% of that school's capacity requires the consent of the Scottish Ministers. Para (c) of schedule 2 also provides that "in the calculation of that pupil capacity regard shall be had to (i) the assessment of capacity on which the education authority have based their proposal; (ii) the maximum number of pupils in attendance at the school in any one year in the period of 10 years preceding the proposal; (iii) the curriculum of the school."
- 9.6 These provisions were the subject of judicial scrutiny by both the Outer and Inner Houses of the Court of Session following a similar consultation exercise undertaken by East Ayrshire Council in 1997 in respect of the former St Paul's Primary School in Hurlford. That case focussed almost entirely on the proper application of the 80% rule. The key elements of the Court's decision, which upheld the Council's position that the St Paul's proposals did not require to be referred, were:-
- they could find no fault with the Council's approach to the assessment of capacity, as set out within the Council's own internal policy document, including the distinction made by the authority between working capacity and planning capacity and the use of the higher planning capacity figure for the purposes of longer term strategic decision making.
 - that while calculating uptake against the assessed capacity figure it is the current number of pupils which require to be used and not the highest roll figure in the past 10 years.
 - that the Court itself struggled to understand how regard could be had in any meaningful way to factor (iii) above in relation to primary schools in particular.
- 9.7 Consequently the Council is entitled to use the assessed planning capacity figure of 101 and the current year's pupil roll (which as at 28 February is 71) when determining whether the proposal require to be referred to the Scottish Ministers under the 80% rule as set out in Schedule 2 to the 1981 regulations. This is entirely the same approach which was previously upheld by the Court of Session.
- 9.8 Reference is made in Sorn School Parent Council's consultation response to a letter from the Head Teacher which, claims the school role is capped at 75. However, any debate between the Council's official assessment of working

capacity (92) and the Head Teacher's informally 'capped' figure of 75 is irrelevant, as it is the 101 figure which should be used. As the school role is less than 80% of working capacity and if the proposal is accepted primary pupils will not have to travel to an alternative school more than 5 miles from Sorn Primary the recommendation, if approved, will not require Ministerial consent.

9.9 Title Implications

9.9.1 Sorn Primary School

The Council's title contains a use restriction restricting the use of the site to school purposes. That use restriction, given that it was contained in a Feu Disposition as opposed to a disposition, ceased to subsist or be enforceable by the former superior as a title condition with effect from 28th November 2004 in terms of the Abolition of Feudal Tenure (Scotland) Act 2000. Whilst the 2000 Act did not impact on the rights of adjacent property owners to enforce conditions contained within a feu writ it is, however, considered given the nature of the use restriction that there are no third parties with a potentially subsisting or enforceable title condition.

9.9.2 Section 75 of the Abolition of Feudal Tenure (Scotland) Act 2000, however, further preserves the rights of the granter of the original title or their assignees as superiors on 28th November 2004 to enforce the use restriction as a matter of contract as opposed to a matter of title. There has been no substantive change in ownership of the superiority interest since the date of grant of the Council's title in 1994 and accordingly it is considered that the contractual obligation subsists. Should the recommendation be followed and the site be declared surplus to requirements the Council would require through negotiation with the title holder of the former superiority to have the contractual obligation discharged prior to any disposal.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 Having carefully considered the responses made during the consultation period, and placed these alongside the current condition of the fabric of the existing Sorn Primary School building, the current and projected occupancy levels of the school, and all of the remaining educational and, importantly also, the non-educational issues detailed throughout this report and which relate specifically to the Scottish Government's Additional Guidance on Local Authority proposals for the School Estate, including School Closures, it is concluded that the original decision to proceed with consultation remains valid.
- 10.2 There is no question that the educational experience for the pupils attending Sorn Primary School is very positive. The attainment levels, at present, are high and pupils have expressed their clear preference for the status quo. However, it is clear that learning and teaching continues to take place despite the environment of the building, not because of its condition. The apparent lack of flexibility, the lack of working space such as a general purpose area are clear hindrances to the educational experience of the young people of Sorn. The ability of larger schools to attract greater entitlement to both staffing and resources needs to be considered as both will impact greatly on the educational experience.
- 10.3 The status quo would ensure that there would be no disruption to children's education. It is accepted that standards of attainment are high at Sorn Primary and the children are happy and well motivated. In addition, the Sorn community is extremely supportive of the school. However, it is recognised that the building is cramped, inflexible in design and unsuited to education in the 21st century. Further the school lacks many of the aids to learning that a new school contains and there is limited scope for their installation without major remodelling of the school. As more and more of the school estate is modernised the disadvantages of the building's condition will become more pronounced. In addition the reducing roll is not best suited to delivery of a modern curriculum.
- 10.4 If option 2 is chosen and pupils transfer to Catrine Primary they will be accommodated in a building which will be upgraded according to a design that best suits delivery of the modern school curriculum. The upgrade will include installation of a wide range of technological and other aids to learning. Better use of teachers' time will result from the ability to pool ideas and share workload with additional staff. There would also be additional teaching and learning resources attracted by a larger pupil roll. At Catrine Primary the standards of pupil attainment is good and improving and combining the two schools will enrich the educational experience for all pupils. However Catrine Primary School has yet to be upgraded, and therefore pupils would be subjected to further disruption while this process is undertaken. Many of the children will have increased travelling which will increase the length of the school day, although individual journey times and distances are short. It is also accepted that some of the children may take some time to become accustomed to a new school environment.

- 10.5 Should Option 3 be accepted and pupils transfer to Mauchline Primary they would be accommodated in a newly refurbished, state-of-the-art educational facility, which affords flexibility for modern education. The facilities in the school include a wide range of technological and other aids to learning. Staff will benefit from better use of teachers' time from pooling ideas and sharing workload. The school would attract additional teaching and learning resources from having a larger pupil roll. Standards of attainment at Mauchline Primary are high and combining the two schools will enrich the educational experience for all pupils. However it is recognised that many of the children will have increased travelling distances and times, which will increase the length of the school day. It is also accepted that some children may take some time to settle into the new surroundings.
- 10.6 The alternatives to the status quo offer two very different propositions. Mauchline Primary has already benefited from a major capital investment and would enable pupils from Sorn to attend a school which is able to deliver a modern 21st Century curriculum. There is the longer term issue for Mauchline of major housing developments which may lead to capacity issues in the longer term. These will be addressed through the normal planning process. It is accepted that Catrine Primary will require significant capital investment to bring to acceptable standards. During this process pupils may be disrupted by construction activities in the school environment.
- 10.7 The impact on the wider village community also needs careful consideration. The school provides approximately 35% of the Village Hall's running costs annually. In addition the After School Club, run by the Sorn Educational Trust, contributes to the running costs and also employs three members of staff. It is questionable that this group could continue operating if pupils were to be transferred to either Mauchline or Sorn. At present 28 families are supported by the After School Care provision.
- 10.8 Therefore in summary, it is considered that Option 3 which will result in the closure of Sorn Primary School in June 2008 and the transfer of pupils to Mauchline Primary School in August 2008, or as soon as possible thereafter, will secure the greatest educational advantage for young people.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Taking account of all the issues raised in consultation, it is recommended that the Cabinet agrees that:

- i) Sorn Primary School be closed with effect from the end of the school session June 2008.
- ii) That the pupils will transfer to Mauchline Primary School in August 2008, or as soon as possible thereafter;
- iii) The Executive Director declares the building and land surplus to educational requirements in August 2008, or as soon as possible thereafter, and remits the matter to the Executive Head of Finance and Asset Management for disposal;
- iv) The Executive Director ensures effective procedures for continued consultation with all relevant stakeholders to inform them of how the matter will be progressed;
- v) In the event of the foregoing recommendations being approved, appropriate officers be remitted to work with the Village Hall Committee, Community Groups and the wider community to ensure the key role of Sorn Village Hall in the viability and sustainability of Sorn; and
- vi) Otherwise note the contents of this report.

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

GRS/EC/DL
13 March 2008

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- i) Written responses to the consultation document
- ii) Cabinet Secretary's Guidance issued to education authorities

Members wishing further information should contact Graham Short, Executive Director of Educational and Social Services, Telephone (01563) 576017.



East Ayrshire
COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL & SOCIAL SERVICES

THIS IS A CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT

SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL

The following schools are affected by this Consultative Document:

- Sorn Primary School
- Catrine Primary School
- Mauchline Primary School

This document has been issued by East Ayrshire Council's Executive Cabinet for consultation in terms of the Education (Publications and Consultation etc) (Scotland) Regulation 1981 and Amendment Regulation 1987, 1988 and 1989.

**EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL & SOCIAL SERVICES**

THIS IS A CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT

Proposal

That subject to the outcome of this consultation exercise:-

- **Current education provision in Sorn Primary School and its existing building be discontinued with effect from June 2008, or as soon as possible thereafter.**
- **Further that the future primary educational provision for pupils currently attending Sorn Primary School should be determined by the Council in accordance with one of the options set out within this report, as yet to be determined.**

Report by Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL'S VISION FOR THE SCHOOL ESTATE

- 1.1 East Ayrshire Council has an established vision for its school estate which will ensure the delivery of a modern curriculum in school buildings that are suitable for purpose. This vision further states:

“East Ayrshire Council’s Department of Educational and Social Services: committed to providing choice, maximising opportunity for all, developing the potential of individuals and meeting needs through inclusion”

- 1.2 This statement covers every aspect of the Department’s work including the management and development of educational establishments. The Council’s 2004 School Estate Management Plan states that development and improvement in the fabric of school buildings is a key component in facilitating the learning and teaching process.
- 1.3 The Council has also approved the Department’s objectives for achieving its aims. These are as follows:
- to reduce surplus capacity in primary schools;
 - to address property maintenance issues;
 - to meet statutory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA); and

- to improve property flexibility.

- 1.4 East Ayrshire Council also subscribes to the vision for Scotland's children as set out in 2004 by The Curriculum Review Group in the document *A Curriculum for Excellence*, which states that "Our aspiration is to enable all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society".
- 1.5 The proposals set out in this document will ensure that all these issues are addressed in a manner which will achieve improvements for all the pupils and staff of Sorn Primary School, whilst also obtaining best value for the Council.

2 EDUCATIONAL PROVISION AT SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL

NOTE: In order to develop this document, the Council has used school roll projections. These are the best estimate of pupil numbers at the time the document was produced. Readers of the document should be aware that the prediction of school rolls into the medium and long term future cannot be done precisely. Figures given in the document should therefore be read with caution and the Council acknowledges this feature of the consultation process."

2.1 Overview

- 2.1.1 Despite the best efforts of staff, parents and pupils, and recognising the excellent work that continues in Sorn Primary School, the school does not accord with East Ayrshire Council's vision for its schools' estate. Even if the building were to be brought up to a modern standard, the design of the building and the small school roll would still not afford staff the flexibility and facilities to deliver *A Curriculum for Excellence* to best effect. The declining roll calls into question the long term viability of the school as a separate establishment.

2.2 Sorn Primary School

- 2.2.1 Sorn Primary School provides non-denominational primary education for pupils from in and around the village of Sorn.
- 2.2.2 The school has a working capacity of 92 pupils with a current pupil roll of 67, at September 2007.
- 2.2.2 The pupil roll projection through to 2015 predicts a steady decline in pupil numbers, as indicated in the following table:

Table 1 : Sorn Primary School Roll Projections

Academic Session	Pupil Roll
2004/05	88
2005/06	84
2006/07	75

2007/08	67
2008/09	63
2009/10	49
2010/11	47
2011/12	41
2012/13	39
2013/14	38
2014/15	37

* This table shows actual pupil numbers, from the September census, for each year up to 2007, and projected numbers, taking account of proposed new house building and all other known factors, through to 2015.

2.2.3 There are currently 25 pupils on a placing request in the school, coming from Catrine, Auchinleck and Galston Primary Schools.

2.3 Educational issues:

2.3.1 Because of the small numbers of pupils and limited resources, it is difficult for small schools to provide the breadth and variety of experience available to pupils in a larger school. This is because:

- in a small school, in the case of Sorn Primary with a population of fewer than 70 pupils across the age range P1 to P7, more of the pupils have to be taught in classes made up of two or more separate stages, that is, composite or multiple composite classes.
- resource management is particularly difficult in a multiple composite situation;
- the *Curriculum for Excellence* is geared to enabling all children to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Confidence, responsible citizenship and the opportunity to contribute effectively are more readily nurtured in a larger school with a mix of pupils of all abilities and a wide range of opportunities and learning situations in which to take part;
- modern teaching methods which make use, for example, of self assessment and peer assessment depend for their effectiveness on interaction between pupils of similar age and stage;
- management of the curriculum presents problems in a smaller school; it is difficult to ensure progression, continuity and pace in a multi-composite situation; it is the peer group that provides children with challenge and motivation and enables the teacher to accelerate the pace of learning;
- a small school, whilst providing a secure and caring environment, lacks the variety of 'extra-curricular' activities and the social mix that pupils experience in a larger school. Team games, for example, are more difficult to organise, pupils are less likely to experience the thrill of 'playing

for the school' and some pupils have inadequate opportunities fully to develop their social skills;

- many pupils coming from a small school tend to find the move to secondary school more difficult, having come from a small and relatively sheltered background.
- It can prove difficult to recruit and retain staff in small schools, which lack many of the career advantages of larger establishments.

2.3.2 The issues summarised above are made more urgent by the fact that Sorn Primary has a falling school roll, projected to fall to under 40 pupils by 2012. Falling rolls makes staff deployment more complex, fewer pupils means fewer members of staff and instead of providing greater continuity of teaching and support for pupils, the effect can be the opposite.

2.4 Buildings issues:

2.4.1 Since 1999 East Ayrshire Council has invested over £100,000 in maintenance and improvements at Sorn Primary School and, despite this, the condition of the building remains completely unsatisfactory. The school has no staffroom, no gym hall and is cramped despite operating at less than its working capacity.

2.4.2 The cost of improvement work to bring the school building to a satisfactory condition, compliant with the requirements of the DDA, is estimated to be approximately £420,000. The condition of the building is such that works are required on almost all aspects of the building, including plumbing, roofs, windows and heating. Even if this work was carried the building would not be set out in a way which could deliver a modern curriculum. In addition there would still be no gym hall built within the school and the village hall would have to be used for dining and physical education.

3 THE PROPOSAL

3.1 **It is for the reasons outlined in section 2.1 to 2.4 above that East Ayrshire Council wishes to consult on the proposal to discontinue educational provision at Sorn Primary School and to transfer the pupils to another establishment to continue their primary school education.**

4 OPTIONS FOR THE CONTINUING PRIMARY EDUCATION OF SORN PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

4.1 In addition to receiving comment on the proposal, the Council wishes to receive feedback on options for the continuing primary education of children currently attending Sorn Primary School, as outlined below. Comments on the identification of other suitable options are also welcome.

4.2 **Option 1 – Status Quo: maintain Sorn Primary School as a separate establishment and in its present accommodation.**

4.2.1 Benefits of Option 1:

- involves no disruption for current Sorn Primary pupils;
- retains the primary school within the Sorn community.

4.2.2 Issues to consider in relation to Option 1:

- fails to address issues associated with Sorn Primary School building, which is can never fully meet the delivery of the 21st Century curriculum;
- more than 50% of Sorn Primary School pupils attend on placing request from outwith the school's delineated catchment area;
- Sorn Primary School building is not DDA compliant;
- investment in repairs and maintenance cannot be justified on best value grounds.

4.3 Option 2 – Close Sorn Primary School and transfer pupils to Catrine Primary School

4.3.1 Catrine Primary School

4.3.2 Catrine primary School provides non-denominational primary education for pupils from in and around Catrine.

4.3.3 The school has a working capacity of 231 pupils with a current pupil roll of 116, at September 2007. The combined roll in 2008-09, if this option were chosen, would be around 200 pupils, which would represent efficient use of the building.

4.3.4 The pupil roll projection through to 2015 predicts an overall decline in pupil numbers, as indicated in the following table:

Table 2 : Catrine Primary School Roll Projections

Academic Session	Pupil Roll
2004/05	137
2005/06	142
2006/07	136
2007/08	116
2008/09	133
2009/10	132
2010/11	127
2011/12	125
2012/13	123
2013/14	118
2014/15	115

* This table shows actual pupil numbers, from the September census, for each year up to 2007, and projected numbers, taking account of proposed new house building and all other known factors, through to 2015.

4.3.5 Catrine Primary School's existing building is basically sound but in need of upgrading to bring it to a standard suitable for the delivery of the modern curriculum and compliant with DDA legislation. This work will be undertaken and would ensure that, if this is the chosen option, the pupils and staff from both schools enjoy high quality accommodation.

4.3.6 Benefits of Option 2:

- improved accommodation and learning environment for all pupils and staff at both schools;
- better suited to the delivery of A Curriculum for Excellence;
- pupils currently attending Sorn by placing request would now be at their zoned school, entitled to free travel if living more than 1 mile from the school;
- more efficient use of staffing and resources;
- refurbishment would ensure DDA compliance;
- reduced maintenance and property costs after refurbishment;
- addresses 'over capacity' issue at both schools.

4.3.7 Issues to consider in relation to Option 2:

- increased travel for some pupils;
- additional transport costs for the authority;
- loss of the primary school to the Sorn community;
- some pupils and parents likely to prefer the smaller school environment.

4.4 **Option 3 – Close Sorn Primary School and transfer pupils to Mauchline Primary School**

4.4.1 **Mauchline Primary School**

4.4.2 Mauchline Primary School provides non-denominational education for pupils from in and around the community of Mauchline.

4.4.3 The school has a working capacity of 460 pupils with a current pupil roll of 312, as at September 2007. The combined roll in 2008-09, if this option were chosen, would be around 375 pupils, which would represent efficient but not cramped use of the building.

4.4.4 The pupil roll projection through to 2015 predicts a gradual decline in pupil numbers, as indicated in the following table:

Table 1 : Mauchline Primary School Roll Projections

Academic Session	Pupil Roll
2004/05	389
2005/06	363
2006/07	328
2007/08	312
2008/09	323
2009/10	314
2010/11	301
2011/12	298
2012/13	303
2013/14	298
2014/15	293

* This table shows actual pupil numbers, from the September census, for each year up to 2007, and projected numbers, taking account of proposed new house building and all other known factors, through to 2015.

4.4.5 Mauchline Primary School has been completely refurbished and extended, thus creating an excellent and modern school building.

4.4.6 Benefits of Option 3:

- 'state of the art' educational facility at refurbished Mauchline Primary School;
- vastly improved accommodation and learning environment for all pupils and staff;
- better suited to the delivery of A Curriculum for Excellence;
- more efficient use of staffing and resources;
- very healthy school roll;
- fully compliant with requirements of the DDA;
- reduced maintenance and property costs;
- addresses 'over capacity' issue at both schools.

4.4.7 Issues to consider in relation to Option 3:

- increased travel for some pupils;
- additional transport costs for the authority;
- loss of the primary school to the Sorn community;
- some pupils and parents likely to prefer the smaller school environment.

5. IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Staffing Implications

- 5.1.1 The proposal as outlined in Options 2 or 3 would result in the majority of the staff at Sorn Primary School transferring to Catrine Primary School or Mauchline Primary School with the pupils. It may be necessary for a small number of staff to transfer to other duties in another school (However, para. 5.1.4 below, should be noted). There would be no compulsory redundancies for permanent staff.
- 5.1.2 This would be achieved without compromising the staffing standard, the ratio of staff to pupils. Pupils would have exactly the same level of support, geared to their individual needs if necessary, as at present.
- 5.1.3 Staff will be fully consulted about their future as will the appropriate trade unions representing all grades of staff affected. The particular wishes of each member of staff will be taken into consideration.
- 5.1.4 If Option 2 or 3 is chosen, the receiving school would be entitled to a staffing enhancement of upto 2.0 FTE (full time equivalent) for a period of two years, in order to ease the transition, assuming the combined roll is over 200 pupils. The school would also receive additional clerical support and resources over this period.

5.2 Financial Implications

- 5.2.1 Savings overall, from the revenue budget, in the region of £104,000 per annum would be anticipated if Sorn primary School were to close and the pupils transfer to Catrine or Mauchline. This figure includes, among other things, rates, furniture and fittings, cleaning, janitorial services and health and safety expenditure. Against this, there would be increased transport costs in transporting some of the Sorn pupils to their new school.
- 5.2.2 The cost of repairs and maintenance of the refurbished school would be relatively low for many years to come.
- 5.2.3 Any proposed disposal of the Sorn Primary School site would require resolution of an existing contractual restriction as to the use of the site and would involve negotiation with a third party. Subject to that process, all proceeds received by the Council from any subsequent disposal would be used to enhance educational provision.

5.3 Transport implications

- 5.3.1 East Ayrshire Council operates a policy of providing free transport to school for any primary school pupil living more than one mile away, by the shortest safe walking distance, from their zoned school. Any pupil living within the catchment area of the combined school and more than 1 mile away from the school would therefore qualify for free transport to school.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet agree to adopt for the purpose of consultation the proposal:

i) That subject to the outcome of this consultation exercise:-

- Current education provision at Sorn Primary School and its existing building be discontinued with effect from June 2008, or as soon as possible thereafter.
- Further that the future primary educational provision for pupils currently attending Sorn Primary School should be determined by the Council in accordance with one of the options set out within this report, as yet to be determined

6.2 It is also recommended that:

i) interested parties be invited to make written or electronic submissions on the proposal to the following addresses :-

By post :Executive Director of Educational & Social Services, East Ayrshire Council, Council Headquarters, London Road, Kilmarnock KA3 7BU.

By e-mail: educationconsultation@east-ayrshire.gov.uk

Written submissions should be returned no later than Monday 21 January 2008.

ii) the Executive Director of Educational & Social Services prepare a report on the results of the consultative process for consideration at a future meeting of the Cabinet

Graham Short
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services