



**Dumfries and Galloway Council
Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing**

Proposal Document: September 2025

**Review of Education Provision
Palnackie Primary School**

Proposal for the closure of Palnackie Primary School

Summary Proposal

Dumfries and Galloway Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process, to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School, which is currently mothballed, and to realign its catchment area to Dalbeattie Primary School.

It is proposed that education provision at Palnackie Primary School be discontinued with effect from 27 April 2026.

Reasons for this proposal

This is considered to be the most appropriate option to address the reasons for the proposal, which are:

- On 22 April 2025, Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low projected pupil roll for August 2025 (3 enrolled pupils).
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers, with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% decline in the 0–15 age group between 2018 and 2032.
- Alongside several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.
- The pupil roll at Palnackie Primary School is not forecast to exceed 10 pupils over the next three years.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment.

This document has been issued by Dumfries and Galloway Council's Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (as amended) and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It has been prepared by the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate with input from other Council Directorates.

Publication Information

The proposal paper will be available, free of charge, at:

- The Village Shop, Palnackie;
- Dalbeattie Customer Service Centre; and
- Dumfries and Galloway Council Headquarters.

And published on Dumfries and Galloway Council's website:

<https://www.dumfriesandgalloway.gov.uk/council-elections/have-your-say/consultations-engagements>

Copies of this paper are also available on request from:

Statutory Consultation – Palnackie Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

E-mail: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

To request this information in a more accessible format or alternative language, please contact the postal or email address listed above.

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

- a) The Parent Councils of Palnackie Primary School and Dalbeattie Primary School
- b) The parents/carers of pupils within the current Palnackie Primary School and Dalbeattie Primary School catchment areas
- c) The parents/carers of any children living within the Palnackie Primary School and Dalbeattie Primary School catchment areas who are expected to start school within two years of the date of publication
- d) The pupils at Palnackie Primary School and Dalbeattie Primary School (considered to be of a suitable age and maturity to express a view on the proposal)
- e) The staff (teaching and non-teaching) at Palnackie Primary School and Dalbeattie Primary School
- f) Trade union representatives
- g) Buittle Parish Community Council
- h) Dalbeattie Community Council
- i) Crichton Campus Leadership Group (including Dumfries and Galloway Council, Dumfries and Galloway College, South of Scotland Enterprise, Scottish Funding Council, SRUC Barony College, University of the West of Scotland, University of Glasgow, Open University, NHS Dumfries and Galloway)
- j) Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland
- k) Chief Executive, NHS Dumfries and Galloway
- l) Area Commander, Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

1.0 Introduction

An initial meeting took place on 15 April 2024 between Council Officers, school staff, and parents, at the request of the school. This meeting was held to discuss the low pupil roll and the sustainability of the school going forward.

A pre-engagement meeting was held at Palnackie Primary School on 26 November 2024, attended by Dumfries and Galloway Council officers, parents and carers, and school staff, including the Principal Teacher and Headteacher. This meeting was chaired by the Head of Education Resources, who outlined the current context of the school and the need to inform families of potential future mothballing due to very low pupil numbers. A description of the mothballing process was provided, along with the distribution of the 'Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate – Mothballing Information Pack', FAQs, and the 'Guide to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 (as amended)' to support parent/carer understanding. Parents and carers were given the opportunity to ask questions. Officers advised that they return in the new year following enrolment, and if pupil numbers had not exceeded the threshold of ten, the school would be put forward for mothballing to the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee, with parents invited to express their views via an online survey for inclusion in a potential future report.

Following enrolment, Officers returned to Palnackie Primary School for a follow-up engagement meeting with parents and carers on 4 March 2025. This meeting was also attended by the Principal Teacher and Headteacher. Officers provided a recap of the previous meeting's minutes and reminded parents that, as agreed in the November meeting, the school had been observed without intervention for a period to monitor pupil enrolment numbers (five pupils were expected for academic session 2025/26 at that time), as agreed in the November meeting. Officers distributed a datasheet with information on projected school roll figures and explained that a paper would be taken to Committee in April to recommend mothballing.

Parents and carers were invited to ask questions and were asked to provide feedback by 17 March via a survey link on whether they agreed to mothballing from August due to critically low pupil numbers. Officers reiterated the purpose of the survey and quoted from the Act: *"Mothballing should not be a way of denying parents access to the statutory consultation process required under the 2010 Act, and if the majority of parents oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible."* Officers also clarified that even if the process advanced to statutory consultation, the recommendation to mothball the school would still be presented due to the critically low pupil roll.

As discussed at the follow-up meeting, an email containing a link to the survey was sent to all parents/carers on 13 March 2025, asking whether they agreed to mothballing. This was a single response per family for children who would be enrolled in the potential mothballed year (2025/26), and the closing date was Monday 17 March 2025. All parents/carers who responded were against the mothballing of the school.

On 22 April 2025, Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low roll for August 2025 (three enrolled pupils). It was also agreed to commence the

statutory consultation process as quickly as possible, at the request of parents and carers. All pupils enrolled at Dalbeattie Primary School who reside in the Palnackie Primary School catchment will have transport provided, and this will continue for any family moving into the catchment from August 2025.

The statutory process for the closure of a rural school is laid out in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The Act, as amended, introduced a presumption against closure of a rural school and details specific requirements which the education authority is required to follow if they are formulating a proposal to close a rural school. This includes the introduction of certain preliminary requirements which must be satisfied prior to the formulation of a proposal. It is necessary to consider any reasonable alternatives before considering closure. It is also necessary to consider the impact on the wider community of a potential closure and the impact of any different travel arrangements. These factors have been considered as part of the preliminary requirements which were undertaken prior to this proposal being written and are set out in the Preliminary Requirements document, which is attached as Appendix 4.

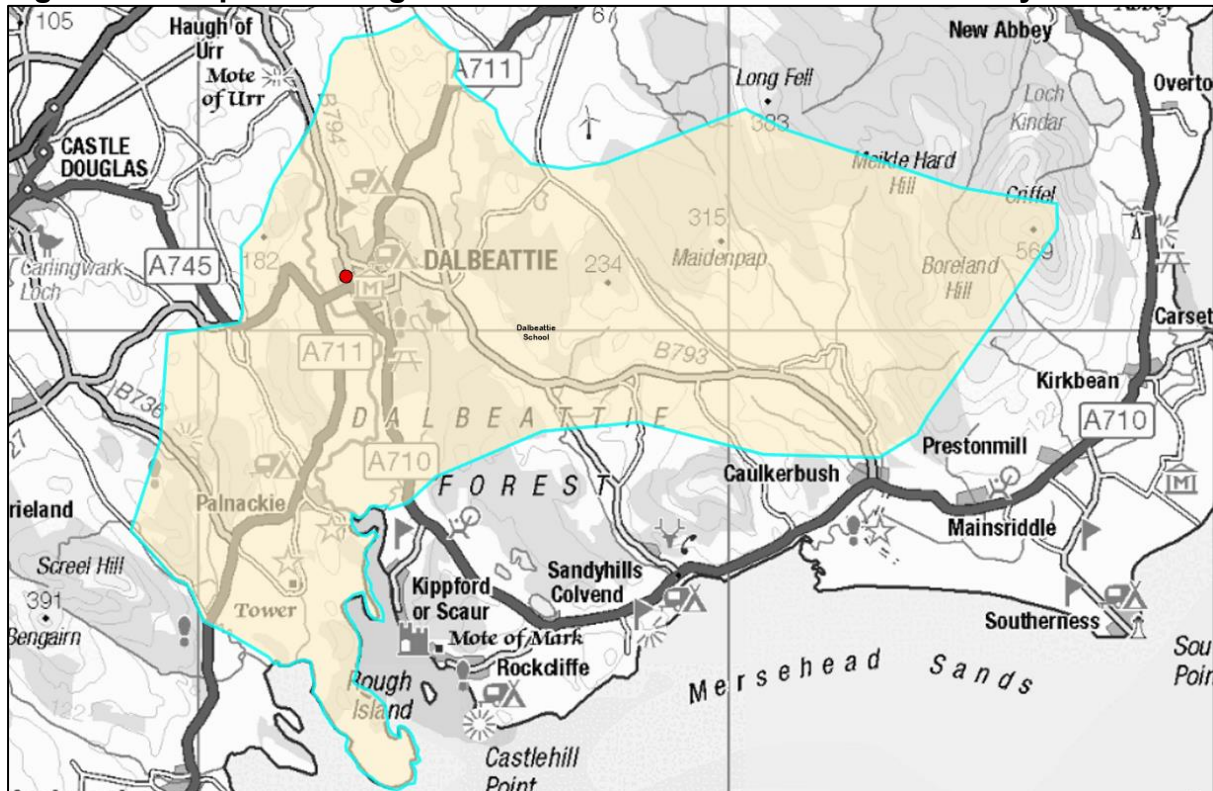
In addition, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 sets out a right for community organisations to request the transfer of local assets into local community ownership/management. The community may wish to consider alternative uses for the building as part of this process.

Councils, as Education Authorities, have a statutory duty under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This duty is reflected in the Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023–2028, Education and Learning Directorate.

Dumfries and Galloway Council aims to improve education and learning opportunities to help all children, young people, and citizens fulfil their potential. This begins with pre-school, continues through school, and progresses into further or higher education or transition into work. Dumfries and Galloway Council works with partners to create and promote lifelong learning opportunities so that everyone in the region can live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to their community. The strategic outcomes of Dumfries and Galloway Council include:

- Places of learning are inclusive, sustainable, and meet the needs of local communities
- We get it right for every child
- Children, young people, and adults transition successfully through all life stages
- Young people and adults succeed in what they want to achieve
- Participation in creativity and play is part of early and lifelong learning experiences
- Local people can build their skills and confidence

Figure 2 – Proposed realigned catchment area of Dalbeattie Primary School



2.1 Reasons for this Proposal

This is considered to be the most appropriate option to address the reasons for the proposal, which are:

- On 22 April 2025, Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low projected pupil roll for August 2025 (3 enrolled pupils).
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers, with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% decline in the 0–15 age group between 2018 and 2032.
- Alongside several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.
- The pupil roll at Palnackie Primary School is not forecast to exceed 10 pupils over the next three years.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment.

2.2 Additional Considerations

In addition to the main reasons outlined above, the following considerations have also informed the proposal to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School:

- The educational benefits, as set out in Section 8, to current and future primary-aged children within the Palnackie Primary School catchment area.

- Councils have a statutory duty, introduced in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to make arrangements to secure ‘best-value’.
- On 30 November 2023, Elected Members approved the 10 School Model Principles to be used as a basis for a sustainable school estate. Applying these principles will help ensure best-value and sustainable settings, resulting in an improved learning environment for all children and young people, while considering the needs and wishes of people and communities. These principles are detailed in the Preliminary Requirements document at Appendix 4.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council currently has in excess of 4,546 (32%) spaces within its current primary school estate (correct as academic year 2024/25). It must be acknowledged that the costs-per-pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high and that underutilised schools are expensive to maintain and operate. The current condition, suitability and over capacity is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the school estate.

3.0 Preliminary Requirements

In accordance with Section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act, Dumfries and Galloway Council is required to satisfy specific preliminary requirements before proposing the closure of a rural school. These requirements uphold the presumption against closure and ensure that any proposal is only brought forward following careful consideration of alternatives and meaningful engagement with the affected community.

Palnackie Primary School is classified as a remote rural school. Following a projected enrolment of only 3 pupils for the 2025/26 academic year, the school was mothballed from August 2025. In line with statutory guidance, Dumfries and Galloway Council undertook a structured engagement process to explore the future of the school and assess whether closure was the most appropriate response.

Dumfries and Galloway Council identified the reasons for this proposal, including:

- On 22 April 2025, Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low projected pupil roll for August 2025 (3 enrolled pupils).
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers, with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% decline in the 0–15 age group between 2018 and 2032.
- Alongside several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.
- The pupil roll at Palnackie Primary School is not forecast to exceed 10 pupils over the next three years.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment.

Through community engagement, including two early engagement meetings and a stakeholder survey, Dumfries and Galloway Council considered reasonable alternatives to closure and assessed the likely educational benefits, community

impact, and travel implications of each option. Three options were presented to the local community by Dumfries and Galloway Council for consideration during the pre-consultation phase, as required by Section 12A of the 2010 Act.

Dumfries and Galloway Council assessed the educational impact of each option. Reopening the school would have resulted in a single-teacher, multi-composite class with limited peer interaction and curriculum breadth. Continued mothballing offered no long-term certainty and risked disengagement. By contrast, Dalbeattie Primary School offered a modern, well-resourced learning environment with broader social and educational opportunities, aligned with Dumfries and Galloway Council's statutory duties under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000.

Dumfries and Galloway Council also considered community impact. While closure would result in the loss of local educational provision, stakeholders expressed strong interest in repurposing the building for community benefit, including potential uses such as a youth centre, outdoor learning hub, or digital enterprise space.

Travel arrangements were reviewed. Nine pupils in the Palnackie Primary School catchment area became eligible for school transport to Dalbeattie Primary School under Dumfries and Galloway Council's School Transport Policy. This resulted in a modest increase in transport costs but was considered manageable and environmentally neutral.

Having satisfied the preliminary requirements and assessed all relevant factors, Dumfries and Galloway Council concluded that the permanent closure of Palnackie Primary School and realignment of its catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School was the most appropriate response. This recommendation was presented to the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee for approval to commence the Statutory Consultation process.

3.1 Alternatives to the Proposal

During the pre-consultation phase, Dumfries and Galloway Council invited stakeholders to consider and comment on three reasonable alternatives to closure, as required under Section 12A of the 2010 Act. These options were discussed in detail at Pre-Consultation Meeting 1 on 13 May 2025, and feedback was gathered through a public survey that closed on 28 May 2025.

The three options were:

- Option A: Re-open Palnackie Primary School
- Option B: Mothball Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment of Dalbeattie Primary School
- Option C: Find an alternative use for the building (closure of Palnackie Primary School with the realignment of catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School)

Following the pre-consultation survey, Option C received the strongest support, with 79% of respondents favouring closure and repurposing of the building subject to Dumfries and Galloway Council's requirement for the facility. Only 15% supported reopening, and 6% supported continued mothballing.

Community members expressed interest in repurposing the building for local benefit, such as a youth centre, community hub, or outdoor learning space. Parents and carers provided mixed feedback, with some favouring reopening due to convenience and emotional attachment, while others acknowledged the challenges of sustaining a school with such low enrolment.

Based on this feedback and Dumfries and Galloway Council's assessment of educational, financial, and community factors, Option C was identified as the most reasonable and widely supported course of action. This formed the basis of the proposal to proceed with statutory consultation on the permanent closure of Palnackie Primary School.

Further detail on the educational benefits, travel arrangements, environmental impact, community impact, and financial implications of each option is provided in Sections 8 to 11 of this document.

4.0 School Roll/Changing Demographics

Demographic trends and pupil numbers were key considerations in the Preliminary Requirements process, as detailed in Section 3.4 of Appendix 4. These factors have informed Dumfries and Galloway Council's assessment of the long-term sustainability of Palnackie Primary School.

The data presented below is drawn from the annual pupil census, conducted each September. Historical school roll figures reflect past census data, while future projections are based on NHS birth data and local development forecasts. It is important to note that school rolls may fluctuate due to families moving in or out of the catchment area and parents/carers exercising their right to submit placing requests.

4.1 Demographics of Dumfries and Galloway

Dumfries and Galloway Council holds electronic records of school rolls back to academic year 1975/76. Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% fall in the 0-15 age group from 2018 to 2032.

The historical pupil rolls for Primary Schools in Dumfries and Galloway and Palnackie Primary School are detailed in Figures 3 and 4 below.

Figure 3

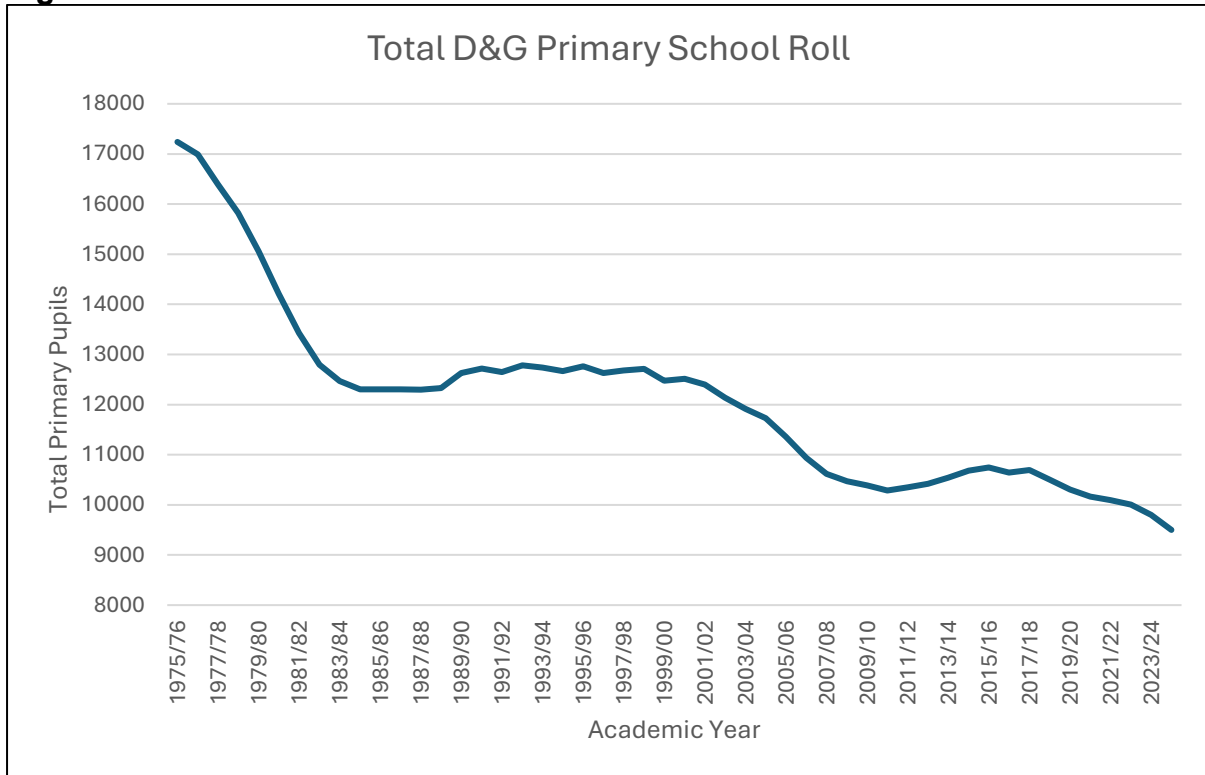
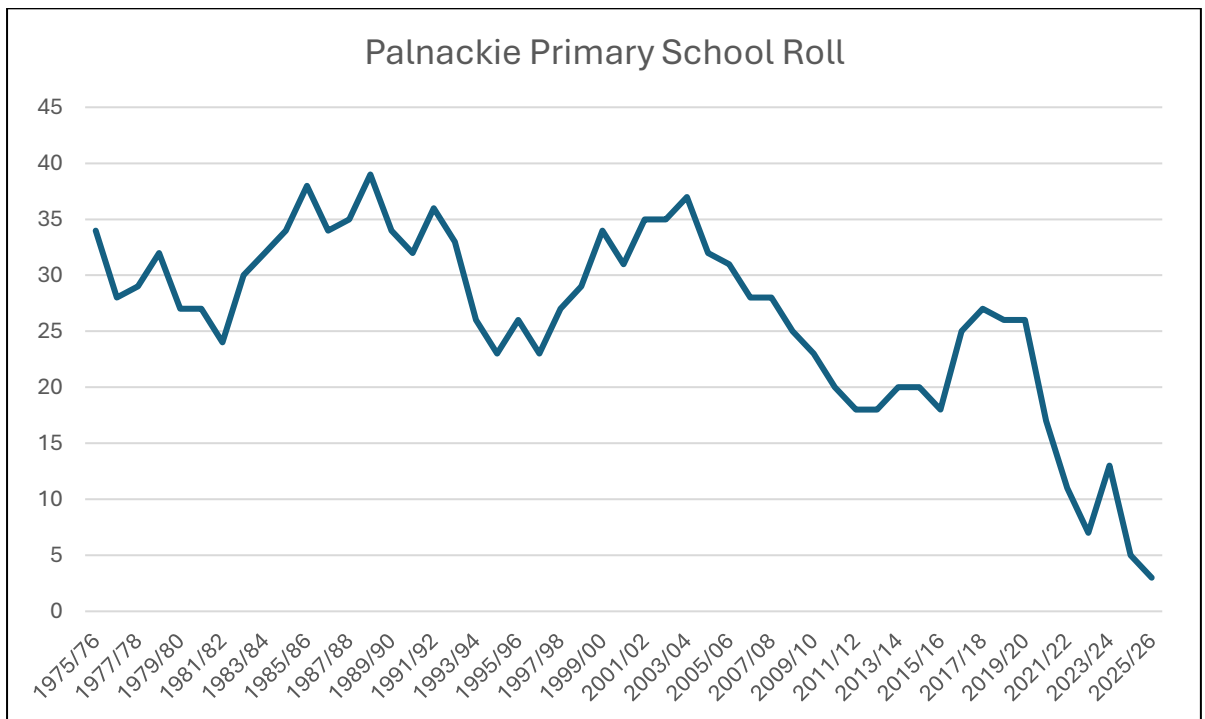


Figure 4



4.2 School Roll

As of May 2025, there were 15 primary-aged children residing within the Palnackie Primary School catchment area. However, only four of these children were attending Palnackie Primary School, with the majority attending Dalbeattie Primary School through parental choice. The school's utilisation rate was just 10%, based on a capacity of 50 pupils.

These figures fall significantly below Dumfries and Galloway Council's target occupancy rate of 60 to 80%, as outlined in the School Model Principles. The sustained decline in enrolment, combined with broader demographic trends - including a projected 18.2% reduction in the 0 to 15 age group across Dumfries and Galloway by 2032 - suggests that the school is unlikely to return to viable operating levels in the foreseeable future.

The pupil roll forecast for Palnackie Primary School is shown in Figure 5 (not adjusted for catchment uptake). These projections are based on the number of primary-aged children for whom transfer forms were received, followed by anticipated catchment figures derived from NHS birth data. It should be noted that school roll figures may fluctuate due to placing requests and changes in residency within the catchment area.

Figure 5

Academic Year	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Primary Total
2025/26	2	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
2026/27		2	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	5
2027/28			2	2	0	1	2	0	0	7

4.3 Projected Roll

If Palnackie Primary School is closed following this Statutory Consultation, its catchment area will be re-aligned to Dalbeattie Primary School. Dalbeattie Primary is part of the Dalbeattie Learning Campus, a modern, fully accessible facility opened in November 2017 at a cost of £26.5 million. The campus includes Nursery, Primary, and Secondary education, and all components are rated A for both Condition and Suitability under core facts. As a Facilities Management (FM) contracted school, it will continue to be maintained to this high standard in future years.

The Learning Estate Strategy highlights the importance of operating schools at approximately 80% utilisation to ensure efficient use of resources. Dalbeattie Primary School currently operates at 73% utilisation, with 87 available pupil places.

Dalbeattie Primary School has a total capacity of 328 pupils. If the Palnackie catchment is re-aligned to Dalbeattie, the projected pupil roll over the next three years is as detailed in Figure 6 below:

Figure 6

School Year	Predicted Dalbeattie Roll	Predicted Palnackie Roll	Predicted Combined Roll	Predicted Combined Utilisation
2025/26	237	3	240	73%
2026/27	241	5	246	75%
2027/28	217	7	224	68%

4.4 Housing Development

The current Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) for Dumfries and Galloway, published in 2019, provides the planning framework for guiding the future use and development of land in towns, villages, and rural areas. It outlines where development, including regeneration, should and should not occur.

LDP2 identifies two allocated housing sites within the Palnackie Primary School catchment area: PAL.H1 and PAL.H2. A Grant of Planning Permission was approved on 30 May 2024 for the erection of 12 dwellinghouses with associated parking, recreational space, and landscaping at the site adjacent to the Old Filling Station (PAL.H2).

LDP2 includes the following policy relevant to housing development in villages:

Policy H2: Housing Development in Villages

Dumfries and Galloway Council will support housing development proposals in villages, subject to other policies in the plan, where:

- The number of units proposed relates to the scale and size of the existing village;
- It does not, on its own or in combination with other developments in the housing market area, undermine the overall objective of the spatial strategy;
- It relates to the layout, density, and design of the character and form of the existing village;
- It would not lead to ribbon development; and
- The proposal would not result in the loss of open space identified in the Open Space Supplementary Guidance.

Any future development within the Palnackie Primary School catchment area (as seen in Appendix 3) would need to comply with the criteria outlined above.

5.0 Teacher Numbers

Teacher numbers have remained relatively stable at the national level, with a 0.5% decrease in the number of teachers across Scotland between 2021 and 2023. In Dumfries and Galloway, however, there has been a 2% reduction in the full-time equivalent (FTE) number of teachers between 2021 and 2024.

If the proposal to close Palnackie Primary School is accepted, there would be no impact on staffing levels at Dalbeattie Primary School.

6.0 Condition and Suitability of the Building

Information relating to the Extent, Condition, Sufficiency and Suitability of the school estate is reported by Dumfries and Galloway Council to the Scottish Government on an annual basis - this is known as the Core Facts Return. Suitability is a measure of whether a school building and its grounds are fit for the purpose of delivering the education curriculum. The suitability of Palnackie Primary School was carried out in 2021, and the school was graded as B (the school buildings and grounds generally support the delivery of services to children and communities).

Condition is concerned with the current state of the fabric of the school and with safety and security, it is undertaken by external surveyors impartial to Dumfries and Galloway Council and follows scoring methodology defined by Scottish Government for all schools. Palnackie Primary School was assessed in June 2020 and the overall condition rating for the property was B - Satisfactory (performing adequately but showing minor deterioration). However, whilst the overall condition is B, there are elements within the survey that are rated C and D.

7.0 Factors for Rural School Closures

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 makes special provisions for rural schools, establishing a procedural presumption against closure. This requires education authorities to follow a more detailed set of procedures when formulating, consulting on, and deciding whether to implement a rural school closure proposal.

Palnackie Primary School is classified as a remote rural school. Under the terms of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, Dumfries and Galloway Council is required to assess the likely effects of closure in relation to the following three statutory factors:

- The likely educational benefits
- The likely effect on the local community (assessed in accordance with Section 12(4))
- The likely effects of different travel arrangements (assessed in accordance with Section 12(5))

These factors are addressed in further detail in Sections 8 to 10 of this Proposal Paper.

8.0 Educational Benefits Statement

The 2010 Act reflects the Scottish Ministers' view that educational benefits should be at the heart of any proposal to make a significant change to schools. Consequently, the Act specifies that the local authority must, for all consultations, prepare an Educational Benefits Statement and publish it within the proposal paper. The Act requires authorities to consider current and future pupils of any affected school, current users of its facilities, and the pupils of other schools in the authority's area. It must also explain how the authority intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects of the proposal.

Should this proposal be implemented, Dumfries and Galloway Council believes that there will be considerable educational benefits, centred around:

- Learning and teaching
- Educational outcomes
- Experiences and opportunities
- The environment for learning

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Headteachers and their teams and allows them the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills, and attributes that young learners need to adapt, think critically, and flourish in an ever-changing global society. Individual Headteachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable, and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners, and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and context.

Palnackie Primary School is classified as a remote rural school (Scottish Government classification) and is 3.2 miles (Source: Google Maps) from Dalbeattie Primary School, which sits within the Dalbeattie High School cluster. Children from Palnackie Primary attending Dalbeattie Primary will benefit from a curriculum design which supports their rural location and the skills and attributes needed to meet their individual needs and rural context.

Dalbeattie Primary School is located in an accessible rural area (Scottish Government classification) and sits within the Dalbeattie 2–18 campus. The campus also incorporates its own Early Learning and Childcare setting (ELC). The ELC and Primary School have their own Headteacher and Depute Headteachers. The Secondary School has its own Headteacher, supported by a leadership team of Depute Headteachers, Principal Teachers, and a School Support Manager. The 2–18 campus setting is recognised as supporting highly effective transitions at every stage of a young person's educational journey. It is well placed to ensure pace, challenge, and progression through a consistent, well-planned curriculum and approach to learning and teaching. Cross-sectoral working supports the learning of all young people, and the curriculum is responsive to their geographical, cultural, and social contexts.

Pupils from Palnackie Primary who join Dalbeattie Primary will benefit from learning with and alongside a greater number of peers of the same age and stage. These larger numbers allow pupils to benefit from increased friendship groups and to develop their social skills through building relationships. These relationships help them become Confident Individuals and Responsible Citizens by allowing them to overcome challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a larger social group within a supportive educational environment. They can work as part of a team, take part in team activities, exercise their responsibilities, and have their voice heard on a range of school-based committees.

8.1 Learning and Teaching

The following section focuses on learning and teaching and the curriculum at Dalbeattie Primary School, the receiving school for children living in the Palnackie

area. Children from the Palnackie Primary School catchment area currently attend Dalbeattie Primary and have the opportunity to attend other schools in the Stewartry area through parental choice.

The curriculum at Dalbeattie Primary School includes a broad range of planned experiences that allow all young people to develop the knowledge, skills, and attributes to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens. Children are encouraged to lead their learning and be active participants who are highly motivated, enthusiastic, and engaged in their learning and the life of the school. The views of young people are actively sought and acted upon. Pupils play a genuine part in school improvement and change. Learning is planned within the four contexts of learning—curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning, the ethos and life of the school, and opportunities for personal achievement. This planning supports young people to achieve their full potential while providing them with a wide range of experiences and opportunities.

Dalbeattie Primary School currently has 226 pupils divided between ten class bases. Children benefit from being part of a social context in which they can build relationships, develop resilience, and gain skills for life, learning, and work. They collaborate with peers in a variety of situations and learning activities, which allow them to exercise responsibility. Pupils are provided with opportunities to work as part of a team and to represent their school at local, regional, and national events.

The National Improvement Framework for Scottish education sets out the expectations and priorities for the education system to raise attainment for all and to close the attainment gap between the most and least advantaged children. Schools must deliver this improvement within the principles and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

The principles of CfE acknowledge the unique contexts in which all schools operate and allow Headteachers and their teams the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that meets the needs of their learners and communities. Headteachers are empowered to exercise their professionalism and autonomy to create an innovative curriculum within the broader guidance of CfE. The Headteacher of Dalbeattie Primary School supports staff through an annual Professional Review and Development process, which leads to professional development opportunities that support effective school improvement and pupil outcomes. School teams work together to support and challenge their professional thinking.

Dalbeattie Primary School sits within the Dalbeattie High School cluster, which comprises Dalbeattie ELC, Primary and Secondary on one 2–18 campus, and the Colvend and Kirkgunzeon Primary School partnership. These cluster arrangements provide opportunities for staff to plan and work together on improvement priorities with stage partners, across stages, and across sectors. They support effective moderation, enhance learning and teaching, improve transitions, support pupil progression pathways, and contribute to positive, sustained destinations.

Dalbeattie Primary School has achieved its bronze Rights Respecting Schools accreditation and is working towards silver. The school has committed to a Children's Rights-based approach and engaged all stakeholders in planning what this will look like within its context. The focus of bronze is to develop children's understanding of

their rights and to plan the journey towards silver accreditation. Dalbeattie Primary is focusing on pupils taking increased ownership of their learning through the development of meta-skills and self-regulation.

The use of digital technologies permeates the school's improvement priorities. The aim is to ensure that all staff have an enhanced understanding of pedagogy and learning theories in relation to digital technology and digital skills. These practices support learners to become digitally literate and equipped to face the challenges of the 21st century.

Dalbeattie Primary School has developed its curriculum to include outdoor learning and learning through play. The school has engaged with Local Authority Principal Teachers of Play to incorporate play as a tool to support pupils' cognitive development and help them gain a better understanding of concepts that enhance their wider development. Through its programme of outdoor learning, the school is enhancing pupils' health and wellbeing, wider achievements, and personal development. Outdoor learning allows pupils to make connections across the curriculum and develop their knowledge, skills, and understanding in meaningful contexts. Using the outdoors as a stimulus provides opportunities for critical thinking, enquiry, challenge, and reflection, as well as boosting self-esteem, self-confidence, and respect for each other and the natural environment.

Dalbeattie Primary School is located within the town of Dalbeattie and is in an accessible rural location. The Headteacher has been in post for several years and has a strong understanding of the community the school serves. The school has had recent positive engagement with HMIE, demonstrating its commitment to improving outcomes for learners.

The Dalbeattie Primary and Dalbeattie High School campus incorporates its own Early Learning and Childcare setting, allowing for close working between school staff and ELC practitioners, as well as effective transitions. Primary 7 pupils from Dalbeattie Primary transition into the secondary school, which is situated within the same building.

8.2 Educational Outcomes

Teachers at Dalbeattie Primary School plan, assess, and track pupil progress to ensure that every child receives the challenge, support, and opportunity needed to reach their full potential. Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is a key priority for the whole staff team. Professional discussions, classroom observations, peer collaboration, learning conversations, moderation, and careful tracking of attainment, progress, wellbeing, and wider achievement ensure that appropriate interventions and support can be harnessed when a child needs it. This support, alongside close working with parents and carers, helps to ensure the needs of every young person are met.

Dalbeattie Primary School's larger number of pupils per stage provides a more consistent picture of attainment at Primary 1, 4, and 7. The school has worked hard in recent years to improve attainment and achievement. In its recent follow-up inspection (February 2025), inspectors noted that "Senior leaders and staff have made positive progress in this area for improvement across the school and nursery," and that "They

now have a strong focus on raising children's attainment in literacy and numeracy. This is helping them to plan for children's learning more effectively."

Rights Respecting Schools and Nurture are key focuses at Dalbeattie Primary School. This approach has supported the development of positive relationships across the whole school community. The larger number of staff and parent/carer body, alongside a greater number of community partners, naturally provides the school with an increased breadth of talent, interests, and opportunities to harness and share. This applies in terms of wider curriculum opportunities afforded to young people, as well as the enhancement provided by staff expertise—for example, in Physical Education and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

8.3 Learner Experiences – Broadening the Range of Opportunities

Children at Dalbeattie Primary School are afforded a wide range of planned activities and experiences that allow them to develop their knowledge, skills, understanding, and attributes. These experiences support their physical, social, and emotional wellbeing, both now and in the future. Combined with strong community links, these opportunities help young people develop skills for learning, life, and work, and support positive learning pathways.

Sitting within a 2–18 campus affords Dalbeattie Primary pupils a relatively unique opportunity in terms of transitions. Work is carefully planned across all sectors to ensure smooth curricular and pastoral transition. Children at Dalbeattie Primary School are provided with a variety of experiences that develop their self-management, social intelligence, and innovation skills.

At Dalbeattie Primary, children are becoming successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors, and responsible citizens. They are engaged in their learning and contribute well during lessons and wider school activities. Positive relationships at all levels are evident within the ethos of the school. Children enjoy good relationships with their peers and feel supported when things are not going well. Pupils feel that they are listened to and that they have an active voice that can enact change.

8.4 Environment for Learning

Dalbeattie Primary School and Nursery was originally established in 1876. However, the current Dalbeattie Primary School is part of a new build 2-18 campus and opened in 2017. It provides a modern learning environment for all children and young people and includes appropriate facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs.

Children attending Dalbeattie Primary School from Palnackie Primary are able to maintain links with children who live in their own village and surrounding area, while also forming friendships across the wider Stewartry catchment area. These relationships extend beyond the school day to activities and clubs taking place in the wider Stewartry area and beyond, with Castle Douglas only six miles away and Dumfries 17 miles away. The positive relationships developed support and enhance experiences and learning in school.

To summarise, should the closure of Palnackie Primary School be implemented, pupils would benefit from a wide range of educational advantages, as identified in the paragraphs above. These benefits would include access to a more diverse curriculum, a broader range of high-quality learning experiences, and the development of self-management, social intelligence, and innovation skills. The learning environment at Dalbeattie Primary School would also offer pupils the opportunity to experience the broader life of the school—through participation in a wider range of committees and community links, involvement in project-based and interdisciplinary learning within and across stages and expanded opportunities for personal achievement and engagement.

8.5 Assessment of likely educational benefits on other users of the school's facilities - Implications for staff

Should this proposal be implemented, there will be no new implications for teaching or ancillary staff at Dalbeattie Primary School. Dumfries and Galloway Council does not envisage any adverse effects from the proposal in respect of staffing. Should any arise, these would be addressed in line with Council policy.

Staff from Palnackie Primary School would benefit from being part of a larger team, with colleagues to work alongside, share professional ideas, and offer support and challenge. Effective collaboration among staff can support moderation, better meet pupil needs, enhance professional development, and improve learning and teaching. Staff often feel more supported when working as part of a larger team and professional learning community.

8.6 Implications for Early Learning and Childcare

Palnackie Primary School does not have Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision within the school. Therefore, pre-five children attend other local authority and private providers across the region. Dalbeattie Primary School does have an ELC, which pupils from the Palnackie catchment area can attend if they wish. As such, there would be no change to the current arrangements for pre-five children across the Palnackie catchment area in relation to ELC provision. Dalbeattie Primary School has positive relationships with ELC providers, and transition arrangements are strong.

8.7 Educational benefits for any future children who would be likely to enrol at Palnackie Primary School (but for implementation).

Children who may live in the Palnackie Primary School catchment area in the future will benefit from the broad range of educational experiences and opportunities outlined above.

Through the proposal, the roll of Dalbeattie Primary School could increase, depending on parental choice of receiving school. This would be beneficial for Dalbeattie Primary, as it would extend the peer group for all pupils, both now and in the future. This, in turn, would support a wider range of social interactions, extracurricular activities, clubs, and committees.

Pupils who would have otherwise attended Palnackie Primary School would benefit from the improved educational experience outlined above. They would also benefit from daily interactions with a larger number of peers and a wider range of shared experiences and opportunities for friendships. This, in turn, will support a successful transition into secondary education and provide greater opportunities to develop and sustain friendships.

8.8 Educational benefits likely for pupils in any other school in the Local Authority.

The current roll of Palnackie Primary School (3 pupils) has an indirect negative effect on pupils across Dumfries and Galloway. The running costs of the school have a disproportionate impact on Dumfries and Galloway Council. If Palnackie Primary School were to close, the current costs would be redirected back into Dumfries and Galloway Council. As a result, they would indirectly benefit the wider pupil body across Dumfries and Galloway.

There would be no other significant impacts, positive or negative, from this proposal on pupils within the local authority who attend other schools.

8.9 Placing Requests

In line with the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, the proposal for the closure of Palnackie Primary School would not affect the rights of parents and carers to request that their child attend a school of their choice, rather than the designated school in whose catchment area the family lives.

8.10 Consideration of how to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the implementation of this proposal

Throughout the consultation process, a concern raised by parents and carers was the distance pupils from the Palnackie Primary catchment area would have to travel to attend school. For those pupils who have chosen to attend Dalbeattie Primary School, the travel distance is 3.2 miles via the A711. Travel time is approximately 6 minutes (Source: Google Maps). Funded school transport would be provided for pupils in accordance with the Dumfries and Galloway school transport policy, should this proposal be implemented.

8.11 Educational Benefits Statement Summary

The ability of pupils from Palnackie Primary School, attending Dalbeattie Primary School as a consequence of this proposal, to participate in a wider range of educational experiences and opportunities is of significant educational benefit. The broader, more diverse pupil body would allow for greater social and emotional development, and opportunities to develop friendships. The educational benefits for children attending Dalbeattie Primary School from Palnackie Primary are numerous and wide-ranging. The main negative effect identified was the need for children to travel by car, taxi, or bus to school. However, due to the rural nature of the Palnackie Primary catchment area, many children regularly travelled by car prior to mothballing.

It is therefore considered that the positive impacts of this proposal outweigh the negative aspect of travel.

9.0 Community Impact

The potential closure of Palnackie Primary School would result in the permanent removal of local educational provision from the village, with pupils transferring to Dalbeattie Primary School. This change reflects a response to persistently low enrolment numbers - only 3 pupils were enrolled for the 2025/26 academic year prior to mothballing - and aligns with Dumfries and Galloway Council's broader strategy to ensure efficient and sustainable use of educational resources. While the school has historically served as a local facility for primary education, demographic trends and parental choice have led to a significant decline in its utilisation, making continued operation increasingly unviable.

Community engagement during the pre-consultation phase revealed that most stakeholders supported repurposing the school building for alternative community uses. Suggestions included transforming the site into a youth centre, community hub, or digital workspace, indicating a desire to retain the building as a valuable local asset. Although some concerns were raised about the broader implications of losing a rural school, the feedback also reflected a pragmatic understanding of the challenges facing small schools with declining rolls. Dumfries and Galloway Council's approach to involve the community in future planning may help ensure that the building continues to contribute positively to village life, even if its educational role comes to an end.

As part of the pre-engagement survey, respondents were asked on their thoughts around the potential future use of the building. A breakdown of how stakeholders responded to the proposed alternatives is listed below:

Question: If a decision was taken to close Palnackie Primary School, do you have any suggestions on the future of Palnackie Primary School, including potential alternative uses for the building?

The respondents to this question suggested a range of alternative uses as can be seen below:

- Community hub or centre
- Youth centre or youth activities space
- Nursery or childcare facility
- Creative or enterprise space (e.g. art, photography, IT hub)
- Outdoor learning or forest school
- Museum or heritage centre
- Fitness or recreation space (e.g. gym, soft play, sports)
- Adult learning or support venue
- Other uses (e.g. hostel, affordable housing, library, holiday rental, pub)

The suggestions detailed above would require the formal closure of Palnackie Primary School through the statutory consultation process. Additionally, Dumfries and Galloway Council would need to confirm that the facility is no longer required for

educational use, enabling the building to be repurposed or considered for transfer of ownership to support alternative community functions (Community Asset Transfer).

Palnackie itself is a small but active village within Buittle Parish, located on the estuary of the River Urr. The community is supported by the Buittle Parish Community Council, which meets regularly at the Palnackie Village Hall and works alongside local groups such as Buittle Quest and the community-owned village shop. The village hosts several small businesses, including North Glen Glassworks and The Old Mill, and is home to the tall ship La Malouine. Larger employers nearby include Barlochan Care Home and Caravan Site.

A key initiative is the Palnackie Community Port project, led by Buittle Quest, which aims to restore and enhance the harbour area for public use and heritage preservation. This reflects a broader community commitment to regeneration and maintaining vital services. While the closure of the school may mark the end of one chapter, the community's proactive engagement and vision for the future suggest that the site could continue to serve as a meaningful local asset.

It is therefore considered that formal closure of this school could have a neutral impact on the wider community, with the Village Hall remaining as the focus for community events and the potential for the repurposing of the Palnackie Primary School property as an opportunity for other community functions.

10.0 The likely effect caused by any different travel arrangements

If Palnackie Primary School is formally closed and its catchment area permanently realigned to Dalbeattie Primary School, there will be changes to travel arrangements for pupils residing in the Palnackie area. Dalbeattie Primary School is located approximately 3.3 miles from Palnackie, and under Dumfries and Galloway Council's School Transport Policy, pupils may be eligible for free transport depending on age and distance from the school.

For the 2025/26 academic year, nine pupils living in the Palnackie catchment area are expected to qualify for school transport to Dalbeattie Primary School. One pupil, residing 2.3 miles from Dalbeattie and aged over eight, would not meet the eligibility criteria. Dumfries and Galloway Council has indicated that transport will be provided for all pupils currently enrolled at Dalbeattie who reside in the Palnackie catchment, and this provision will continue for any new families moving into the area.

The impact of these travel changes is expected to be minimal in terms of journey duration, as Dalbeattie is within a short driving distance and well-connected by local roads. However, for families without access to private transport, reliance on Council-provided school transport may become a more significant factor in daily routines. Dumfries and Galloway Council will continue opportunities to optimise transport routes and vehicle occupancy to manage costs, ensure efficiency and provide safe routes.

Overall, while the closure of Palnackie Primary School would result in longer travel distances for some pupils, the arrangements fall within acceptable thresholds outlined in the School Model Principles. The provision of transport mitigates potential barriers

to access, and the proximity of Dalbeattie Primary School ensures continuity of education without undue disruption.

11.0 Financial Impact

In line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010: technical guide and financial template, a comprehensive financial analysis is provided in Appendix 1, outlining the estimated costs associated with maintaining Palnackie Primary School as a fully operational and occupied facility. These figures are based on the 2023/24 financial year, which represents the last full year of active use prior to the school being mothballed.

Column 2 of Table 1 at Appendix 1 shows the projected annual running costs of Palnackie Primary School (based on previous financial year 2023/24) whilst Column 3 shows the additional impact on Dalbeattie Primary School as the receiving school. The annual recurring savings (or costs) are shown in Column 4.

In the 2023/24 academic year, the cost per pupil at Palnackie Primary School was £16,119, based on a school roll of 12 pupils. This figure is based on an indicative operational cost for that year of £193,425, reflecting the financial implications of maintaining the school during its last full year of occupancy. More recent cost data is not yet available at the time of writing. However, the projected school roll for 2025/26 was expected to be 3 pupils prior to mothballing.

The additional financial impact on the receiving school (column 3) is not yet known, as pupils from Palnackie Primary School only realigned and commenced attendance at Dalbeattie Primary School in August 2025, with mothballing commencing for Palnackie Primary School on the same date. As such, the annual recurring savings (calculated as column 2 minus column 3) cannot be fully determined at this stage.

Table 1, School Costs. There are no figures included for column 3 as the receiving school does not require any additional staffing to accommodate the pupils from Palnackie Primary School. Any staffing surplus has been accounted for, with staff redeployed in line with Dumfries and Galloway Council's policies and included as part of the annual workforce planning exercise.

Table 1, Building Costs. There are no figures included for column 3 as the receiving school does not require any additional accommodation for the incoming pupils – the small number of additional pupils living in the Palnackie catchment area can be accommodated in existing number of classbases. Property insurance and rates are set at zero throughout the financial template, as rate relief is applied and all Dumfries and Galloway Council properties are insured under a collective policy. As such, no individual insurance or rates costs are attributed to specific properties.

Table 1, School Operational Costs. The roll of Dalbeattie Primary School for 2025/26 has decreased, even with the addition of pupils from the Palnackie catchment area. As a result, the school's Devolved School Management (DSM) budget has been adjusted to reflect new arrangements and actual pupil roll in line with Dumfries and Galloway Council's funding formula and is a redistribution of funding rather than an additional cost. There are no additional costs associated with school catering, as

meals were already prepared at Dalbeattie's production kitchen and transported to Palnackie. This arrangement may result in a future realised saving, as catering operations are now fully consolidated at Dalbeattie.

Table 1, Transport Costs. There may be an increase in transport costs, as all pupils entitled to free transport under Dumfries and Galloway Council's school transport policy must continue to be accommodated. Due to the recent change in transport arrangements, the exact costs of additional provision are not yet confirmed. However, the procurement of a larger vehicle (increasing capacity from a 16-seater to a 30-seater) will result in higher expenditure. While implementation of the proposal will likely lead to increased transport costs, these may be offset by the savings associated with no longer maintaining and operating Palnackie Primary School or the amalgamation and optimisation of existing transport routes.

At present, Table 3 in Appendix 1 contains no data, as Palnackie Primary School was only mothballed in August 2025. Consequently, annual property costs associated with mothballing are not yet available or confirmed.

Table 5 in Appendix 1 details the impact on Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE). As detailed in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010: technical guide and financial template, there are four GAE lines that can be impacted as a result of school closure. In this context, only the pupils who transferred from Palnackie to Dalbeattie Primary School will result in a reduction in GAE funding, as Dalbeattie does not meet the rural school criteria. No GAE funding will be lost for pupils who transfer to Auchencairn or Kirkgunzeon Primary, as both schools qualify as rural establishments with fewer than 70 pupils. Dumfries and Galloway Council will likely lose GAE funding for three pupils now attending Dalbeattie Primary School, including one who was already living within the Dalbeattie catchment area.

The financial impact of closing Palnackie Primary School has been assessed across key areas including operational costs, staffing, transport, and funding. Analysis of 2023/24 data highlights high per-pupil costs and a declining school roll, indicating that continued operation is not financially sustainable. While some costs, particularly transport and adjustments at the receiving school, are still being finalised, early evidence suggests that closure will result in significant savings. The expected annual recurring saving is £152,385.11, with minimal mothballing costs and potential for future asset disposal. Dumfries and Galloway Council will see a small reduction in Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) for pupils now attending Dalbeattie Primary School, but no loss for those attending other rural schools. Overall, the proposal supports a cost-effective and sustainable approach in line with Dumfries and Galloway Council policy.

12.0 Impact Assessment

Dumfries and Galloway Council will undertake an impact assessment and Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) during the consultation process in respect of this proposal, to ensure that due regard is given to whether the decisions we make are likely to impact on different groups of people across the region. The result of the impact assessment should highlight any barriers or discrimination that might affect the communities of Palnackie Primary School, ensuring we meet our statutory duties under the Equality Act including the Fairer Scotland Duty.

13.0 Preliminary Requirements

Prior to formulating a rural school closure proposal under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, the Education Authority must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in Section 12A of the 2010 Act. Dumfries and Galloway Council has previously identified its reasons for formulating a possible proposal, has considered whether there were any reasonable alternatives to the possible proposal as a response to those reasons, and has assessed each of the options in accordance with Section 12A(2)(c) of the 2010 Act. After considering a paper addressing these preliminary requirements on 22 April 2025, Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the commencement of the Statutory Consultation process for the closure of Palnackie Primary School in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

No decision will be taken by Dumfries and Galloway Council on the proposal contained in this paper until after the end of the consultation period. Education and Learning Committee will then receive a report on the consultation and will reach a view on the proposal.

14.0 Consultees

A summary of this document will be issued free of charge to all of the consultees listed at page 3 of this document and it will also be published on Dumfries and Galloway Council's website: www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations

15.0 Consultation Period

As part of the consultation process, the Education Authority must publish the proposal paper, advertise it, and notify Education Scotland and all relevant consultees, as prescribed by Schedule 2 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended, inviting them to make representations on the proposal. The consultation period will run from 3 September 2025 to 5pm on 29 October 2025, which includes at least 30 school days.

16.0 Public Meeting

A public meeting will be held on Tuesday 24 September 2025 at 6pm in Palnackie Village Hall. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting and participate is welcome to do so. The meeting will be convened by the Education and Learning Directorate, and Officers will present the reasons for bringing forward the proposal. There will be an opportunity for questions to be asked and comments to be made. A note will be taken so that comments can later be summarised and considered.

17.0 Responses to the Proposal

Representations may be made on the following:

- the proposal;

- alternatives to the proposal as listed above; and
- suggestions of other alternatives.

Dumfries and Galloway Council will consider all representations, and these should be received no later than 5.00pm on Wednesday 29 October 2025 by one of the methods detailed below:

Online Survey: <https://forms.office.com/e/dKFUeSK4Ee>



Letter to: Statutory Consultation – Palnackie Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

Email to: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

Respondents are required to clearly state the capacity in which they are expressing their views and agree to their name and any statement/comments being published as part of the Statutory Consultation process and published in the final Consultation Report (all other personal information will be redacted).

18.0 Meetings with Pupils and Staff

School staff will arrange to discuss proposals with pupils who are considered to be of suitable age and maturity in the affected schools. A record of questions, responses, and views will be taken, and this will be published in the Consultation Report.

19.0 Involvement of Education Scotland (HMle)

Following the close of the consultation, Dumfries and Galloway Council will provide Education Scotland with copies of the written representations submitted, a summary of the oral representations made at the public meeting, and any other relevant

documentation. This will allow Education Scotland to prepare a report on the proposal within a period of three weeks.

20.0 Consultation Report and Time for Further Consideration

After receiving Education Scotland's report, Dumfries and Galloway Council will then prepare and publish a Consultation Report in accordance with Sections 9, 10, and 13 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended. It is expected that on 17 February 2026, Members of the Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee will thereafter make their final decision on whether to implement the proposal. The decision will be made a minimum of three weeks after publication of the Consultation Report. If the Education and Learning Committee makes a closure decision, Dumfries and Galloway Council shall notify the Scottish Ministers within six working days of that decision and publish the fact that the Scottish Ministers have been notified, and that representations can be made to them. The Education Authority would also be required to publish a notice on its website of the decision to implement the proposal and explain why it is satisfied that closure is the most appropriate response to the reasons for formulating the proposal.

21.0 Explanation of Approach

The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (Section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980) and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (Section 3 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000).

22.0 Designation of Rural Schools

Palnackie Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended (the school is classified as "remote rural"), and Dumfries and Galloway Council has had regard to the provisions of the Act, in particular the special consideration required for rural school closures. Dumfries and Galloway Council has considered the school roll projections for Palnackie Primary School (see Section 4.2); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 3.0 and 3.1); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 9.0); and to the impact of travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Palnackie Primary School catchment (Section 10.0). At present, the pupils who live within the Palnackie Primary School catchment attend Dalbeattie Primary School, Castle Douglas Primary School, and Auchencairn Primary School.

23.0 Call-in of Closure Proposal and Determination of Case

The Scottish Ministers will have a maximum of eight weeks to call in any closure decision made by Dumfries and Galloway Council in certain circumstances. This eight-week timeframe would consist of an initial three weeks from the date of decision, during which representations can be made to the ministers, and a further five weeks for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether to issue a call in notice. During this period the Education Authority will not proceed to implement any closure decision.

If the Scottish Ministers call in a closure proposal, it is referred to the Convener of the School Closure Review Panels. The Convener must constitute a School Closure Review Panel within seven days for determination. The Education Authority may not implement a closure decision in whole or in part until the Panel has made its determination. It will usually issue a decision within eight weeks of the Panel being constituted.

If the School Closure Review Panel refuses to consent to the closure decision, or following publication of the Consultation Report Dumfries and Galloway Council decides not to implement the closure proposal, a further closure proposal cannot be published in relation to the school for five years, unless there is a significant change in the school's circumstances.

24.0 Grounds for Call-In etc

The Scottish Ministers may issue a call-in notice where it appears to the Scottish Ministers that Dumfries and Galloway Council may have failed:

- (a) in a significant regard to comply with the requirements imposed on it by (or under) the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended so far as they are relevant in relation to the closure proposal, or
- (b) to take proper account of a material consideration relevant to its decision to implement the proposal.

25.0 Conclusion

Dumfries and Galloway Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process, to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School, which is currently mothballed, and to realign its catchment area to Dalbeattie Primary School.

It is proposed that education provision at Palnackie Primary School be discontinued with effect from 27 April 2026.

It has been assessed that the proposal is the most appropriate means of addressing the underlying reasons for formulating it, which are:

- On 22 April 2025, Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low projected pupil roll for August 2025 (3 enrolled pupils).
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers, with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% decline in the 0–15 age group between 2018 and 2032.
- Alongside several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.
- The pupil roll at Palnackie Primary School is not forecast to exceed 10 pupils over the next three years.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment.

In addition to the main reasons outlined above, the following considerations have also informed the proposal to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School:

- The educational benefits, as set out in Section 8, to current and future primary-aged children within the Palnackie Primary School catchment area.
- Councils have a statutory duty, introduced in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003, to make arrangements to secure 'best-value'.
- On 30 November 2023, Elected Members approved the 10 School Model Principles to be used as a basis for a sustainable school estate. Applying these principles will help ensure best-value and sustainable settings, resulting in an improved learning environment for all children and young people, while considering the needs and wishes of people and communities. These principles are detailed in the Preliminary Requirements document at Appendix 4.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council currently has in excess of 4,546 (32%) spaces within its current primary school estate. It must be acknowledge that the costs-per-pupil in under-occupied schools are excessively high and that underutilised schools are expensive to maintain and operate. The current condition, suitability and over capacity is unsustainable and can only be improved by reducing the school estate.

Template

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
Current revenue costs for school proposed for closure	Costs for full financial year 23/24 (projected annual costs)	Additional financial impact on receiving school [Dalbeattie Primary School]	Annual recurring savings (column 2 minus column 3)
Name of school PALNACKIE PRIMARY SCHOOL			
School costs			
<i>Employee costs - note 1</i>			
teaching staff	142,253	-	101,212
support staff	11,610	-	11,610
teaching staff training (CPD etc)	-	-	0
support staff training	-	-	0
Supply costs - note 2	116	-	116
<i>Building costs:</i>			
property insurance	-	-	-
non domestic rates	-	-	-
water & sewerage charges	350	-	350
energy costs	17,253	-	17,253
cleaning (contract or inhouse)	5,402	-	5,402
building repair & maintenance	179	-	179
grounds maintenance	2,450	-	2,450
facilities management costs - note 6	1,970	-	1,970
revenue costs arising from capital	-	-	-
other	541	-	541
<i>School operational costs:</i>			
learning materials	4,034	-	4,034
catering (contract or inhouse)	6,385	-	6,385
SQA costs	-	-	-
other school operational costs (e.g. licences)	0	-	0
<i>Transport costs: note 3</i>			
home to school	-	-	-
other pupil transport costs	-	-	-
staff travel	1,074	-	1,074
SCHOOL COSTS SUB-TOTAL	193,615	-	152,575
Income:			
Sale of meals	190	-	190
lets	-	-	-
External care provider	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-
SCHOOL INCOME SUB-TOTAL	190	-	190
TOTAL COSTS MINUS INCOME FOR SCHOOL	193,425	-	152,385
UNIT COST PER PUPIL PER YEAR	16119	-	-

Column 5

Column 6

Column 7

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

Table 3

Annual Property costs incurred (month-balling) until disposal
property insurance
non domestic rates
water & sewerage charges
energy costs
cleaning (contract or inhouse)
security costs
building repair & maintenance
grounds maintenance
facilities management costs
other
TOTAL ANNUAL COST UNTIL DISPOSAL

Table 4

Non-recurring revenue costs
TOTAL NON-RECURRING REVENUE COSTS

Table 5

Impact on GAE - note 5	GAE IMPACT
	5157

Notes

1. The total costs incurred for teaching staff (row 5) and support staff (row 6) are required to be included. Column 2 should include the current costs for a full financial year for the school proposed for closure, and column 3 should include the *additional* cost to the receiving school as a result of staff transferring.

For teaching staff, this should include regular teachers, itinerant teachers, learning support teaching staff and special education (ASN) staff.

Itinerant teaching staff includes central support services such as English as additional language support, hearing, visually impaired services, educational psychology services.

For support staff, this should include classroom assistants, administration staff and janitorial staff.

For all staff the costs entered should include salary, NI and pension costs.

If the school proposed for closure has less than 3 staff members, then the cumulative staff costs only should be given in row 5 (for both teaching and support staff), so as to avoid possible disclosure of individual salaries.

Training costs should be identified separately in rows 7 and 8.

2. Supply costs to cover teaching and support staff. This may be held in a central budget, be devolved or shared across the budgets.

3. 'Home to school' pupil transport costs should include those school transport costs incurred in accordance with Council policy. 'Other pupil transport costs' will cover costs incurred for the transport of pupils for activities such as swimming etc

4. Row 30 of column 3 should include the additional transport costs related to the increased home to school transport arrangements that are put in place in accordance with Council policy. This figure is therefore likely to be considerably higher than current costs.

5. This table is to capture the impact on the revenue support grant as a result of changes to GAE. Impact on GAE should consider the issues covered in the GAE section of the guidance document that accompany this template.

6. Facilities management costs will include costs related to caretaking, janitorial and security.

7. The capital costs for the receiving school should be taken across the life cycle of the school in line with the life expectancy of that school. The capital costs for the school proposed for closure should be taken across the same life cycle period.

Statutory Consultation – Palnackie Primary
School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

2 September 2025

E-mail: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

Dear Consultee,

Review of Education Provision Notice and Summary of Proposal for closing Palnackie Primary School, Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is consulting on the proposal to close Palnackie Primary School. This notice provides a summary of the proposal; it is a requirement for you to be notified of the consultation as a consultee, in accordance with Schedule 2 Section 1 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is conducting a public consultation from Wednesday 3 September to Wednesday 29 October 2025. This is the period in which you will be able to make representation to Dumfries and Galloway Council in respect of the proposal. It is important that everyone we are consulting with tells us about their thoughts on the proposal.

This summary provides further information on where a full copy of the proposal can be obtained and also advises as to how you can make representation.

The Proposal

Dumfries and Galloway Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the Statutory Consultation process, to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School which is currently mothballed and realign its catchment area to Dalbeattie Primary School.

It is proposed that education provision at Palnackie Primary School be discontinued with effect from 27 April 2026.

Reasons for this Proposal

This is considered to be the best option to address the reasons for the proposal which are:

- On 22 April 2025 Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low pupil roll for August 2025 (3 enrolled pupils).
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18.2% fall in the 0-15 age group from 2018 to 2032.
- Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is also facing increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.
- Palnackie Primary School pupil roll is not forecast to exceed 10 pupils in the next 3 years.
- Whilst the school is mothballed, the building is deteriorating with limited budgets for repairs, maintenance and capital investment.

Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028, Education and Learning Directorate.

The Council will improve education and learning opportunities to help all our children, young people and citizens fulfil their potential. This starts with pre-school, then school, before progressing into further or higher education or transition into work. We will work with our partners to create and promote lifelong learning opportunities so everyone in the region can live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to their community.

Strategic Outcomes:

- Places of learning are inclusive, sustainable and meet the needs of local communities.
- We get it right for every child.
- Children, young people and adults transition successfully through all life stages.
- Young people and adults succeed in what they want to achieve.
- Participation in creativity and play is part of early and lifelong learning experiences.
- Local people can build their skills and confidence.

Alternatives to the Proposal (Including the Proposal)

The proposal and alternatives to the proposal were considered as part of the preliminary requirement and are detailed below;

- a. Re-open Palnackie Primary School.
- b. Mothball Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment of Dalbeattie Primary School.
- c. Find an alternative use for the building (closure of Palnackie Primary School with the realignment of catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School).

Representations may be made on the following;

- the proposal;
- alternatives to the proposal as listed above; and
- suggestions of other alternatives.

What we will do –

We will consult by:

- Providing a notice of the consultation and a summary of the proposal to the relevant consultees - **this is that notice and summary**.
- Placing an advert in the local press.
- Putting information on our website - www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations
- Holding a public meeting to explain the proposal.
- Ask all consultees to tell us what they think of the proposal.

What to do now –

- Please read the full proposal document.
- Please attend the public meeting which will be held on Wednesday 24 September 2025 at 6pm at the Village Hall, Palnackie.
- Let us know what you think by 5pm on Wednesday 29 October 2025 via:

Online Survey: <https://forms.office.com/e/dKFUeSK4Ee>



Letter to: Statutory Consultation – Palnackie Primary School
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Militia House
109/111 English Street
DG1 2HR

Email to: statutoryconsultation@dumgal.gov.uk

Respondents are required to clearly state the capacity in which they are expressing their views and agree to their name and any statement/comments being published as part of the Statutory Consultation process and published in the final Consultation Report (all other personal information will be redacted).

What Next?

Dumfries and Galloway Council is seeking your views on the proposal during the consultation period - it does not assume that the proposal will go ahead. All points raised during the consultation period will be included in the final consultation paper before being presented to Elected Members at Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 17 February 2026 where a decision will be taken as to the outcome of this process.

If the proposal goes ahead, any children current and future from the Palnackie Primary School catchment area would be educated at Dalbeattie Primary School.

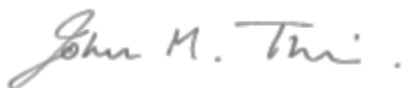
Please note that this summary document is for convenience only. Copies of the Proposal Paper can be obtained from:

- The Village Shop, Palnackie.
- Dalbeattie Customer Service Centre.
- Dumfries and Galloway Council Headquarters.

And published on Dumfries and Galloway Council website:

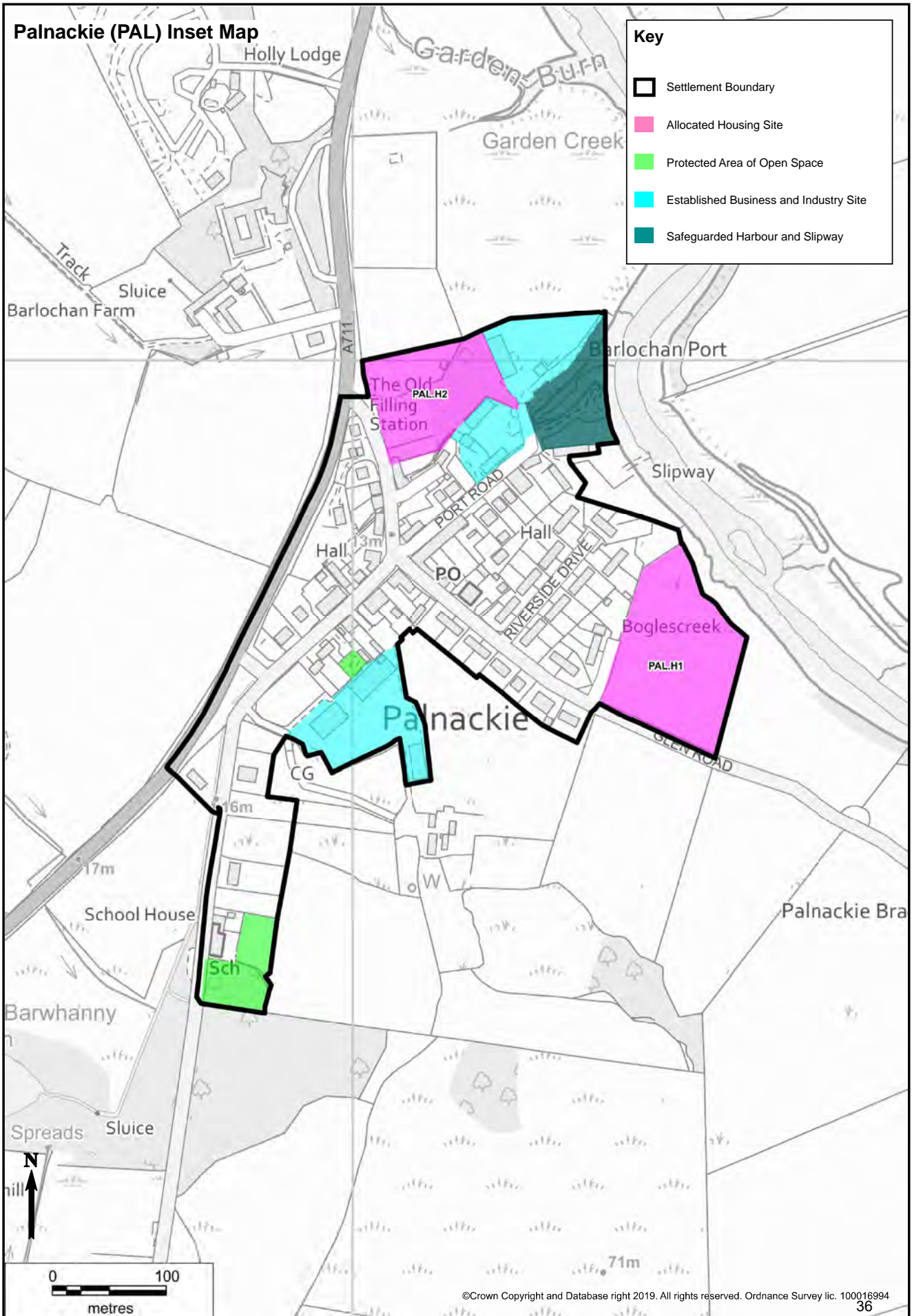
www.dumgal.gov.uk/consultations

Yours faithfully



John Thin
Head of Education Resources

Dumfries and Galloway Council Local Development Plan 2



Palnackie Primary School – Phase One – Preliminary Requirement

1.0 Introduction

Dumfries and Galloway Council are committed to giving all local children and young people an equal chance to fulfil their potential. Our ambition is to be a successful region, with a growing economy, based on fairness, opportunity and quality public services, where all citizens prosper. For our children and young people, raising attainment in schools is key to who they may become and how they will contribute to society. This will require a sustainable school estate that works for everyone and is able to provide ‘best-value’ to the public.

The Dumfries and Galloway Learning Estate Strategy was agreed by the Education and Learning Committee on 26 January 2023. The Learning Estate Strategy (LES) sets out a holistic, long-term view to ensure all schools are well designed, well maintained and well managed and most importantly that this view is shared between all stakeholders and decision makers.

On 30 November 2023, Elected Members approved the 10 School Model Principles listed below to be used as a basis for a sustainable school estate. Applying these principles will help ensure ‘best-value’ and sustainable settings, resulting in an improved learning environment for all our children and young people, whilst considering the needs and wishes of people and communities.

To meet current and future demand, we must continue to transform services, reduce spend in unsustainable areas and be prepared to think differently about how services are delivered to make the most effective use of resources. The School Model Principles were generated from public consultation and are weighted, with the priority for review starting at the top of the list, and are listed below:

School Model Principles

1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
2. Primary pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school.
3. Secondary pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 45 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school.
4. To enhance high quality social and educational experiences, primary schools should ordinarily support 3 classes and have composite classes of no greater than 3-year groups.
5. To enhance high quality social and educational experiences, secondary schools should ordinarily support a 2-form entry (2 registration classes in S1).
6. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising of at least 3 FTE members based at the same school.
7. Schools should have an occupancy rate where possible greater than 60% utilisation of the capacity of the school and ideally should be operating at 80% utilisation.
8. All schools should be adaptable to children, staff, and visitors with disabilities.

9. All schools should support community use where required in the local context.
10. All schools should have key facilities including a hall, dining area, staff room, school office and grass playing fields as appropriate to the size and scale of the school.

Maintaining the engagement of stakeholders and keeping them informed is an important part of successful change. The co-operation of a variety of stakeholders will be needed, and we know that good consultation means better outcomes, and the benefits of engaging with, consulting and involving stakeholders at this early stage helps to manage expectations and identify all the options.

The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended requires that educational benefits should be at the forefront of any proposal to make a significant change to schools. It specifies that the local authority must, for all consultations, prepare an Educational Benefits Statement and publish it within the proposal paper. Only through a close partnership with our schools and stakeholders can a proposal be produced that will benefit both current and future learners.

2.0 Reason for the Proposal

An authority that is formulating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended before starting to prepare its proposal paper.

[12A Preliminary requirements in relation to rural school closure

(1) This section applies where an education authority is formulating a closure proposal as respects a rural school.

(2) The authority must—

(a) identify its reasons for formulating the proposal,

(b) consider whether there are any reasonable alternatives to the proposal as a response to those reasons,

(c) assess, for the proposal and each of the alternatives to the proposal identified under paragraph (b) (if any)—

(i) the likely educational benefits in consequence of the implementation of the proposal, or as the case may be, alternative,

(ii) the likely effect on the local community (assessed in accordance with section 12(4)) in consequence of such implementation,

(iii) the likely effect that would be caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required (assessed in accordance with section 12(5)) in consequence of such implementation.

(3) For the purposes of this section and section 13, reasonable alternatives to the proposal include (but are not limited to) steps which would not result in the school or a stage of education in the school (within the meaning of paragraph 12 of schedule 1) being discontinued.

(4) The authority may not publish a proposal paper in relation to the proposal unless, having complied with subsection (2), it considers that implementation of the closure proposal would be the most appropriate response to the reasons for the proposal.

(5) In this section and section 13, the references to the reasons for the proposal are references to the reasons identified by the education authority under subsection (2)(a).]

In particular, it must identify the underlying reasons why the future of the school is being considered, which are as follows:

- Palnackie Primary School pupil roll following enrolment is three children for academic year 2025/26.
- In an early engagement survey, all parents who responded opposed the mothballing of the school. Where parents oppose mothballing, the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 Statutory Guidance states it is appropriate for the local authority to move to Statutory Consultation as soon as possible.
- Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers with the National Records of Scotland predicting a further 18% fall in the 0-15 age group over the next 10 years.
- Along with several other rural councils, Dumfries and Galloway Council is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is therefore considering the future of Palnackie Primary School. The various options are explored within this paper.

3.0 Background

An initial meeting took place on 15 April 2024 between Officers, school staff and parents at the request of the school. This was to discuss the low pupil roll and the sustainability of the school going forward.

A pre-engagement meeting was held at Palnackie Primary School and took place on 26 November 2024. This was attended by Council Officers, parents and carers and school staff including the single Principal Teacher and Head Teacher. This early engagement meeting was chaired by Head of Education Resources where the current context of the school and the need for this early engagement meeting to inform families of potential future mothballing based on very low pupil numbers was discussed. A description of the mothballing process was then given, including the distribution of 'Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Directorate – Mothballing Information Pack' and FAQ and 'Guide to the Schools (Consultation)(Scotland) Act 2010 As Amended' to help support parent/carer understanding. Finally, parents and carers had the opportunity to ask questions to the Officers. Officers informed parents and carers that they would return in the new year following enrolment if pupil numbers at the school had not exceeded the threshold of ten at which point the school will be put forward for mothballing to the Skills, Education and Community

Wellbeing Committee, with the opportunity for parents to state whether they agreed with mothballing or not via an online survey for inclusion in a potential future report.

Following enrolment, Officers returned to Palnackie Primary School for the follow-up early engagement meeting with parents and carers on 4 March 2025. This meeting was also attended by the Principal Teacher and Head Teacher. Officers provided a re-cap of the previous meeting's minutes and reminded parents that the school had been left alone for a period of time to check pupil enrolment numbers in March (five pupils were expected for academic session 2025/26 at that time) as agreed in November meeting. Officers handed out a datasheet with information on the school roll projection. Officers explained that a paper will be taken to committee in April to recommend mothballing for Members decision. Parents and carers had the opportunity to ask questions about the process and agreed to feedback responses by 17 March on whether they agreed to Mothballing from August due to critically low pupil numbers via a survey link provided by Officers. Officers reiterated the purpose of the survey and quoted from the act: "Mothballing should not be a way of denying parents access to the statutory consultation process required under the 2010 Act and if the majority of parents oppose mothballing, it would be appropriate to move to statutory consultation on closure as soon as possible." Officers also explained that even if the process advanced to Statutory Consultation, the recommendation to mothball the school will still be presented due to the critically low pupil roll.

As discussed at the follow-up meeting, an email containing a link to a survey was sent to all parents/carers asking if they agreed to Mothballing on 13 March 2025. This was a single response per family for children who would be enrolled in the potential mothballed year (2025/26), and the closing date was Monday 17 March 2025. All parents/carers who responded to that survey were against the mothballing of the school.

On 22 April 2025 Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee agreed to the mothballing of Palnackie Primary School due to the very low roll for August 2025 (3 enrolled pupils). It was also agreed to commence the Statutory Consultation process as quickly as possible at the request of parents and carers. All pupils enrolled at Dalbeattie Primary who reside in the Palnackie Primary School catchment will have transport provided and this will continue for any family moving into the Palnackie Primary School catchment from August 2025.

3.1 Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028

Councils, as an Education Authority, have a statutory duty in terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to make adequate and efficient provision of school education across their entire area for the current school population and future pattern of demand. This is reflected in the Dumfries and Galloway Council Plan 2023-2028, Education and Learning Directorate.

The Council will improve education and learning opportunities to help all our children, young people and citizens fulfil their potential. This starts with pre-school, then school, before progressing into further or higher education or transition into work. We will work with our partners to create and promote lifelong learning opportunities so everyone in the region can live a meaningful and fulfilling life and contribute to their community. The Strategic Outcomes of the Council are:

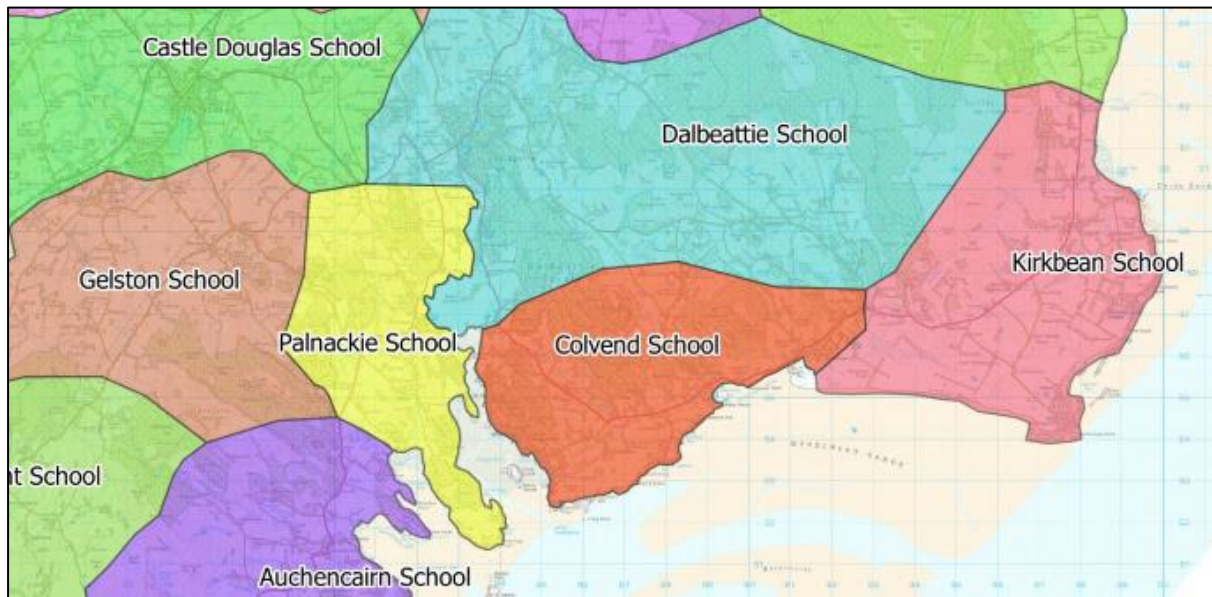
Strategic Outcomes

- Places of learning are inclusive, sustainable and meet the needs of local communities
- We get it right for every child
- Children, young people and adults transition successfully through all life stages
- Young people and adults succeed in what they want to achieve
- Participation in creativity and play is part of early and lifelong learning experiences
- Local people can build their skills and confidence

3.2 Palnackie Primary School

Palnackie Primary School is classified as being located in a remote rural area. Scottish Government defines a remote rural area as areas with a population of less than 3,000 people, and with a drive time of over 30 minutes but less than or equal to 60 minutes to a settlement of 10,000 or more. Palnackie Primary School is located within the village of Palnackie, 3.7 miles from the town centre of Dalbeattie and 3.3 miles from Dalbeattie Primary School.

Palnackie Primary School catchment borders the catchment areas of Auchencairn Primary School, Castle Douglas Primary School, Dalbeattie Primary School and Gelston Primary School, as seen in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1

The distance between Palnackie Primary School and its bordering schools as sourced from Google Maps are listed below:

Auchencairn Primary School	4.6 miles
Castle Douglas Primary School	5.9 miles
Dalbeattie Primary School	3.3 miles
Gelston Primary School	4.7 miles

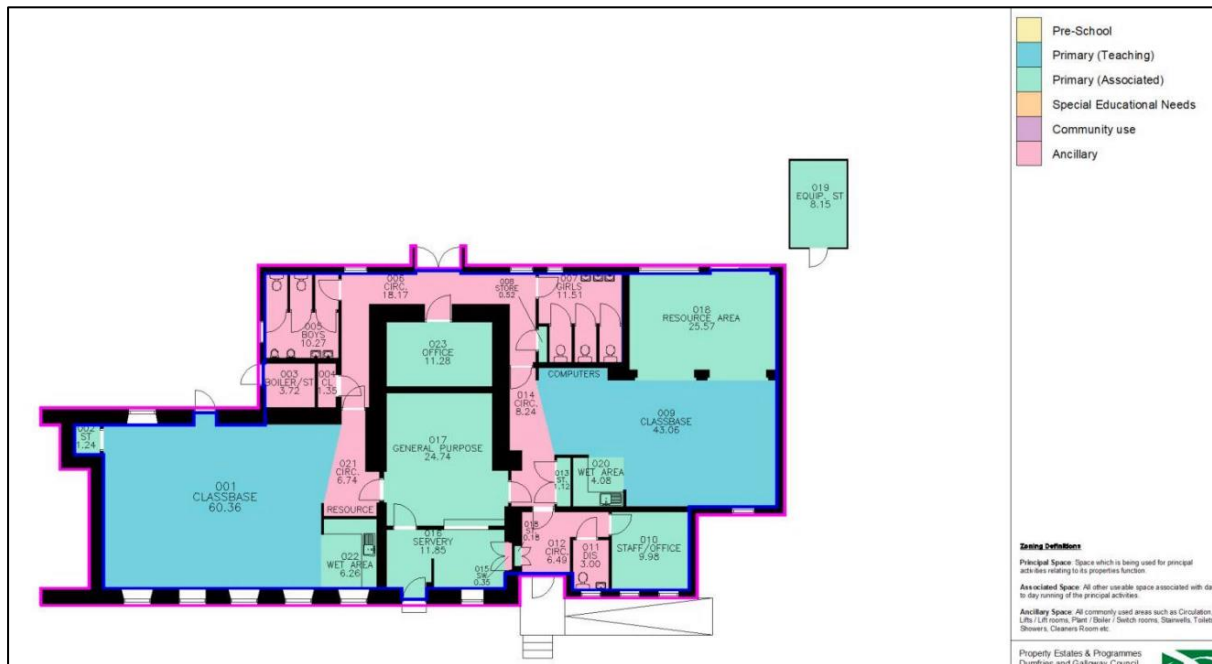
It is important to note that the geography of the catchment area means that travel distances/times will be different for all pupils, which is why the information listed above is from Palnackie Primary School to surrounding schools.

Palnackie Primary School site and school building are owned by Dumfries and Galloway Council. Confirmation of any title restrictions are currently with legal services, there is no record of the building, or any part of the building being listed with Historic Environment Scotland.

Palnackie Primary School delivers primary education from P1 to P7. There is no nursery on site and local children attend nursery at other nearby schools or partner provider nurseries in the wider area. The school has been operating as a single teacher school since academic year 2020/21 where the roll had dropped to 17 pupils. The threshold for a second teacher in Dumfries and Galloway is 19 pupils or above.

The school has a capacity of 50 pupils. It is a single storey building comprising of two classbases, cloak area, pupil and staff toilets and a number of office and general-purpose spaces. The school has a servery which provides meals that are prepared daily at nearby Dalbeattie Learning Campus and transported to the school. There is an outdoor playing area at the rear of the school with limited parking space at the front. The school has no indoor space suitable for physical activity and instead use the village hall which is a 7-minute walk away. The school floorplan of the school is shown below:

Figure 2



Information relating to the Extent, Condition, Sufficiency and Suitability of the school estate is reported by Dumfries and Galloway Council to the Scottish Government on an annual basis - this is known as the Core Facts Return. Suitability is a measure of whether a school building and its grounds are fit for the purpose of delivering the education curriculum. The suitability of Palnackie Primary School was carried out in 2021, and the school was graded as B.

Condition is concerned with the current state of the fabric of the school and with safety and security, it is undertaken by external surveyors impartial to Dumfries and Galloway Council and follows scoring methodology defined by Scottish Government for all schools. Palnackie Primary School was assessed in June 2020 and the overall condition rating for the property was B - Satisfactory (performing adequately but showing minor deterioration). However, whilst the overall condition is B, there are elements within the survey that are rated C and D.

3.3 Housing Development

The current Local Development Plan (LDP2) for Dumfries and Galloway was published in 2019 provides the planning framework and guides the future use and development of land in towns, villages and rural areas. It also indicates where development, including regeneration, should happen and where it should not.

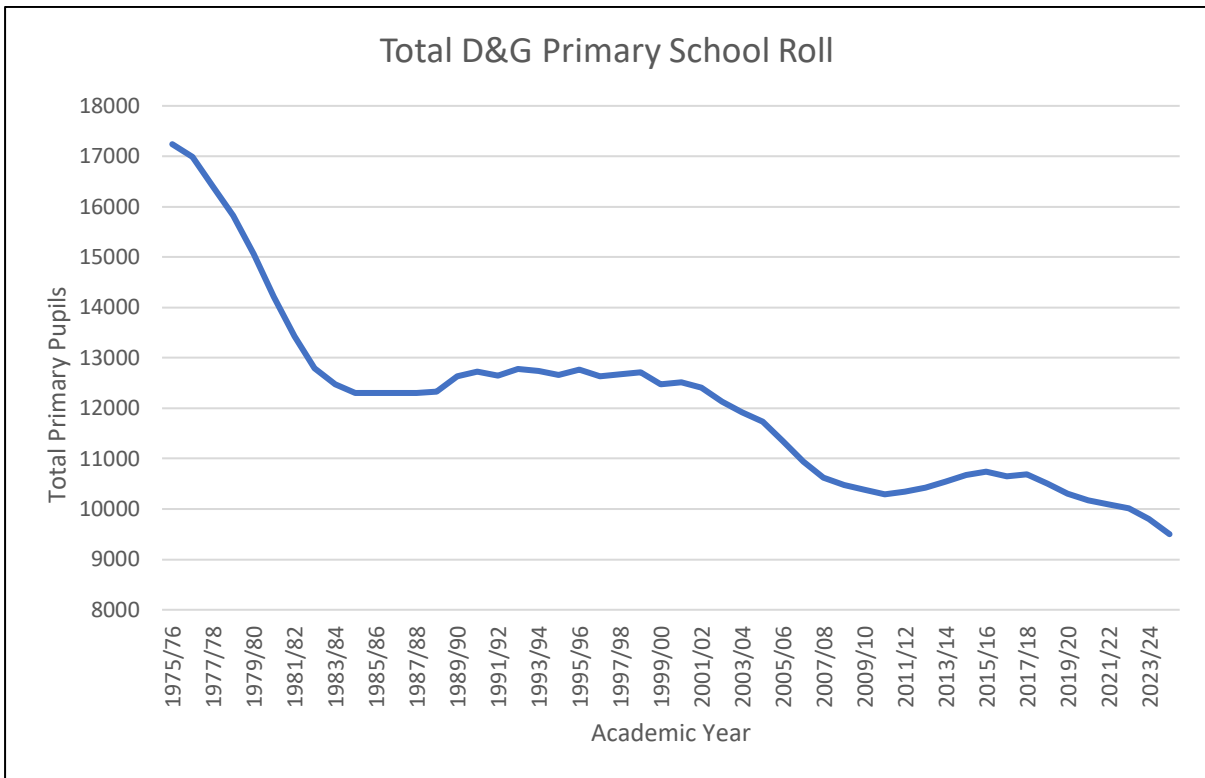
The Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) 2019 identifies two allocated sites in the Palnackie Primary School Catchment area (planning ref PAL.H1 and PAL.H2). A Grant of Planning Permission was approved for the erection of 12 dwellinghouses with associated parking, recreational space and landscaping in the site adjacent to Old Filling Station (PAL.H2) on 30 May 2024.

3.4 Demographics and Pupil Numbers

National Records of Scotland predict the number of children and young adults in Scotland aged 0 to 29 years will decrease between mid-2022 to mid-2047. Over this 25-year period it is predicted there will be -79.9k fewer children aged 0-15 and -57.4k fewer young adults aged 16-29. By 2047, children will make up only 14% of the population.

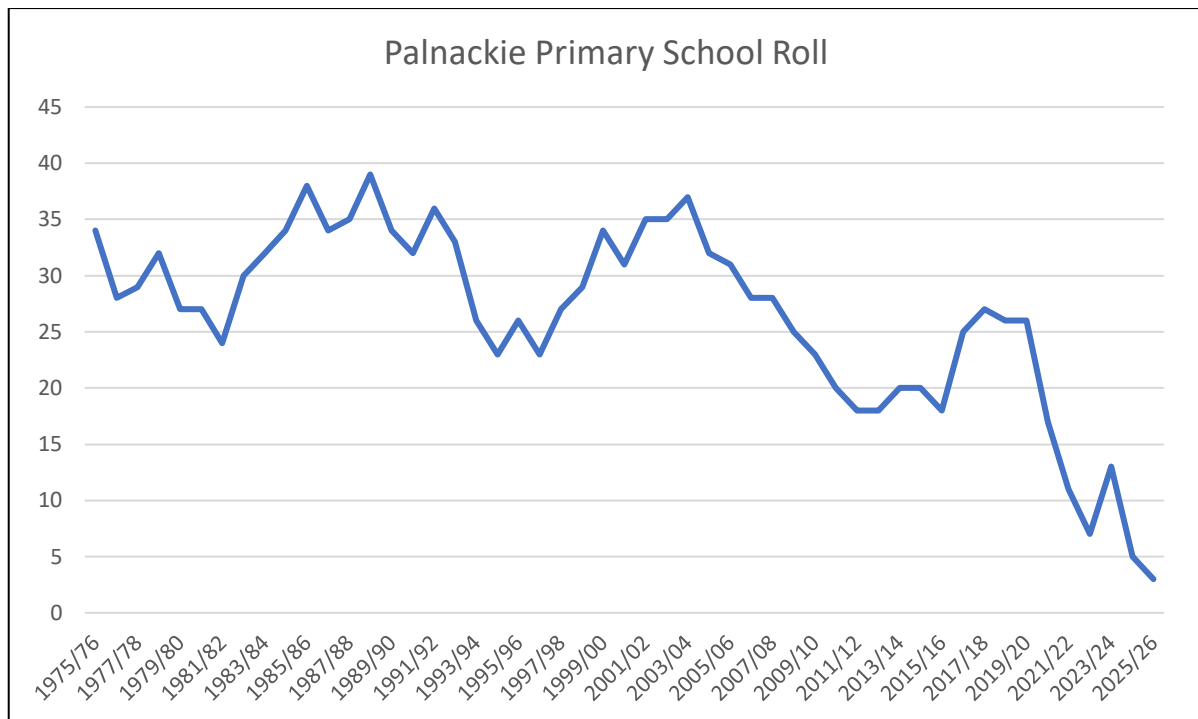
Dumfries and Galloway Council holds electronic records of school rolls back to academic year 1975/76. Dumfries and Galloway is currently experiencing a significant and sustained fall in pupil numbers. The total Dumfries and Galloway Primary School Roll since 1975 is displayed on the graph below:

Figure 3



The historical school roll of Palnackie Primary School is detailed below:

Figure 4



There are currently 15 children of P1 to P7 age residing within the catchment area of Palnackie Primary School (SEEMiS data, May 2025). The majority of catchment pupils attend Dalbeattie Primary School (67%) through parental choice and one other catchment pupil attends Castle Douglas Primary School (7%).

With a current roll of 5 pupils (4 catchment and 1 non-catchment, see Figure 5 below), the school is operating with a utilisation of 10%. If all current catchment pupils were to attend Palnackie Primary School, the utilisation of the school would be 32%. This is significantly below the desired occupancy levels as described in School Model Principle 7 (Schools should have an occupancy rate where possible greater than 60% utilisation of the capacity of the school and ideally should be operating at 80% utilisation). Such a low occupancy level is unsustainable. The number of pupils currently enrolled for school year 2025/26 can be found in the table below.

Figure 5

Academic Year	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Primary Total
2024/25	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	5
2025/26	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3

3.5 Pupil Enrolment

The decision to propose the mothballing of the school was taken in March 2025 following the Primary 1 enrolment process. During the first early engagement meeting it was agreed with parents and carers that there would be the opportunity for families to enrol or transfer their child(ren) to Palnackie Primary School in January 2024 for academic year 2025/26 before any decisions on mothballing would be made. It was stated at this meeting that the threshold of more than 10 catchment pupils as per the existing Members agreement would need to be met to avoid the potential mothballing of Palnackie Primary School.

On the close of the enrolment period the school roll had fallen, with two pupils having submitted placement requests at Dalbeattie Primary School for next session (2025/26). This would see a pupil roll for academic year 2025/26 of only three pupils.

4.0 Community Engagement

Council Officers from the Education and Learning Directorate conducted the following engagements with the communities of Palnackie Primary School to keep them fully informed and to explore potential options for the future of Palnackie Primary School.

Early Engagement Meeting 1 – 26 November 2024 – Palnackie Primary School

Council Officers met with parents/carers and school stakeholders to discuss the falling pupil roll at Palnackie Primary School. Parents were informed that a decision regarding mothballing would be made in the new year based on the pupil roll following enrolment.

Early Engagement Meeting 2 – 12 March 2025 – Palnackie Primary School

A follow-up session was held at the school to continue gathering views and update stakeholders. Pupil numbers remained low, and as captured through an online survey there continued to be no parental support for mothballing. Officers advised that the matter would be referred to Elected Members of the ES&CW Committee for a formal decision on next steps and that the recommendation would be to mothball the school and initiate pre-consultation as part of the preliminary requirements for rural school closure.

Parent/Carer Online Survey – 17 March 2025

Parents and carers were surveyed to ask if they agreed to Mothballing Palnackie Primary School as described above. All parents and carers who responded were against mothballing.

Pre-Consultation Meeting 1 – 13 May 2025 – Palnackie Primary School

Council Officers informed stakeholders at the school that Elected Members had agreed to mothball Palnackie Primary School from August 2025 due to a projected roll of only three pupils and that pre-consultation will now begin. Officers outlined the statutory process required before a closure proposal could be made for a rural

school and launched a stakeholder survey to gather feedback on reasonable alternatives to closure.

Pre-Consultation Meeting 2 – 10 June 2025 – Palnackie Primary School

Survey results were shared, with 33 responses received. The majority (79%) supported finding an alternative use for the building, and there was little support to re-open the school and limited indication that pupil numbers would rise significantly in the next three years. Based on this, Officers confirmed that the recommendation for statutory consultation on permanent closure would be presented to Elected Members of the Education, Skills & Community Wellbeing Committee on 1 July 2025.

5.0 The Proposal and Reasonable Alternatives to the Proposal

There is a new duty on the authority in terms of section 12A(2) to identify any reasonable alternatives to the proposal which might also address the reasons for the proposal.

The following three options were identified, with no additional options proposed by stakeholders through the pre-consultation survey. Of the 33 responses received, the number of stakeholders who responded in favour for each individual option is included in brackets below.

The three options for appraisal are:

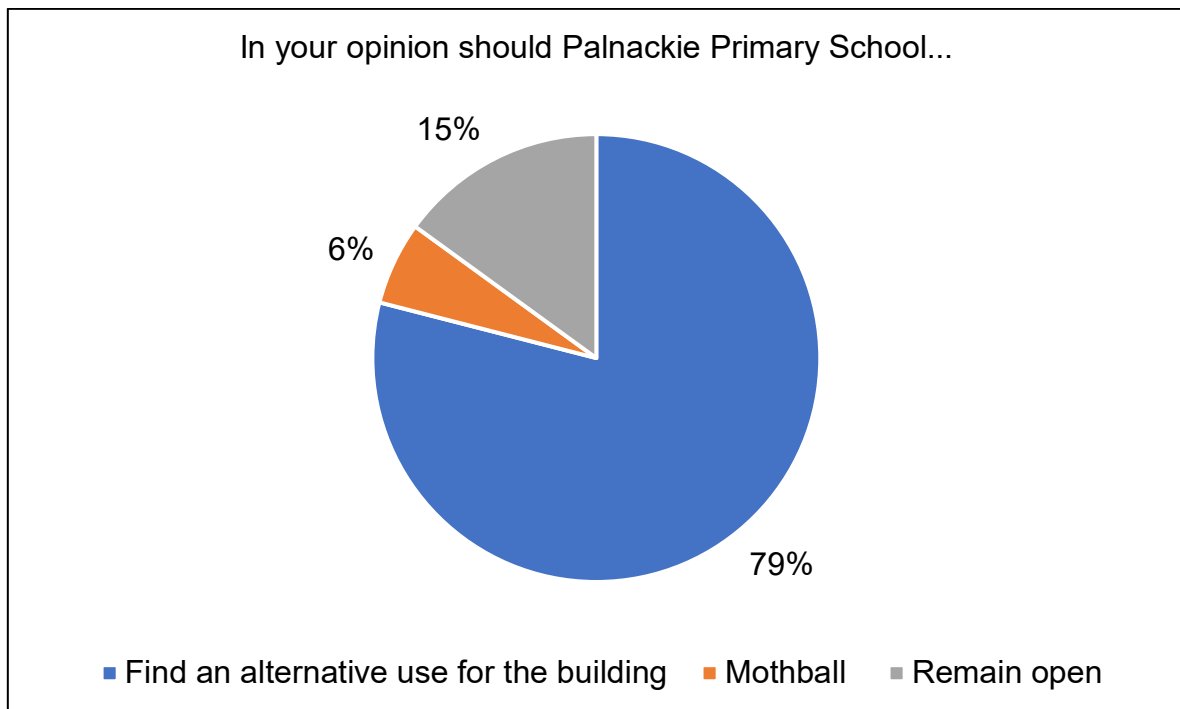
Option A: Re-open Palnackie Primary School (5 stakeholders in favour)

Option B: Mothball Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment of Dalbeattie Primary School (2 stakeholders in favour)

Option C: Find an alternative use for the building (closure of Palnackie Primary School with the realignment of catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School) (26 stakeholders in favour)

A breakdown of how stakeholders responded to the proposed alternatives can be found in the diagram below:

Figure 6



These results show the strongest consensus lies with repurposing the school for other community uses, especially among local residents. Parents expressed mixed views, while there was no clear endorsement of mothballing as a long-term solution. No additional alternatives were proposed by respondents to the survey. Further detail can be found in the individual option appraisals below.

6.0 Option A: Re-open Palnackie Primary School

This option proposes that Palnackie Primary School reopens for the delivery of primary education from August 2025, reversing the current agreement made by Elected Members of the Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee to mothball the school from that date. If implemented, the school would resume with a projected roll of three pupils, all of whom would be taught within a single, multi-composite class by one teacher, managed by a partnership Head Teacher.

Reopening the school under these conditions would maintain educational provision within the village and avoid disrupting the current catchment alignment. However, this option would require ongoing commitment of staffing and resources despite critically low pupil numbers and minimal projected growth over the next three years. It would also reintroduce operational challenges common to single-teacher schools, particularly regarding curriculum breadth, peer socialisation, staff workload, and equity of learning experience when compared with schools with higher rolls in the region.

While reopening would respond to the wishes of a small number of parents who expressed a desire for local access to education, it must be considered within the

broader statutory context. The education authority has legal duties under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to ensure the adequate and efficient provision of school education, and under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 to secure continuous improvement and raise standards. Re-opening with such a limited cohort may conflict with these obligations, particularly where better-resourced alternatives are available within a very short distance.

In appraising this option, it is necessary to weigh the community value of retaining a school in the village against the practical and educational implications for learners and staff operating within a minimally populated, single-classroom model.

6.1 Community Feedback

A total of 15% respondents (5 out of 33) to the pre-consultation survey supported re-opening Palnackie Primary School.

Support for this option was concentrated among parents/carers, with 2 out of 4 who identified themselves as part of this stakeholder group selecting this option. Their comments focused on practical needs such as childcare convenience and personal connection to the school. One parent highlighted that their child loved the school and that it suited their family circumstances. Members of the community showed limited support (2 out of 28), with an additional non-stakeholder supporting this option (whose identified relationship to Palnackie Primary School as 'local teacher').

Comments on this option included:

"Children should be going to the school in their village."

"Encourage more small school partnerships in surrounding areas. After school clubs."

"Look into the QUALITY of the education there, not just numbers."

"Keeping rural schools open should form a central plank of a broader policy of economic regeneration and affordable housing provision which aims to counter the demographic decline of the area as a whole."

6.2 Pupil Numbers

Enrolment for academic year 2025/2026 took place in January 2025 for all families across Dumfries and Galloway. As a result, five children were enrolled at Palnackie Primary School for August 2025, however this figure has subsequently changed to three through additional transfer requests.

At present, there are 15 primary aged children living in the catchment area, 4 of which attend Palnackie Primary School (27%).

The pupil roll forecast for Palnackie Primary School therefore is as follows (not adjusted for catchment uptake):

Figure 7

Academic Year	N4	N5	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Primary Total
2025/26	2	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
2026/27		2	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	5
2027/28			2	2	0	1	2	0	0	7

6.3 Financial Information

The education authority has a statutory duty to ensure that adequate and efficient provision of school education is made for its area (The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 s.1(1)).

If Palnackie Primary School were to remain open, there would be no change in the current recurring revenue costs. The annual revenue cost for Palnackie Primary School (as per financial year 2023/24) was £193,425. If the status quo was to be maintained, the school would operate with a single class teacher at a ratio of 1:3 pupils, and a partnership Headteacher.

There are currently no enrolled pupils eligible for school transport as per the council policy. Further detail on travel distances can be found later in this section.

6.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

6.4.1 Community Impact

If Palnackie Primary School was to re-open from August there would be no change in circumstance for the local community.

6.4.2 Travel arrangements

If the school were to remain open, the Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023 will apply to children living in the catchment area who wish to attend Palnackie Primary School.

The Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023 states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*
- To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

And:

2.4 There is no requirement on the Council to provide transport for pupils who have been granted a placing request to attend a school other than the school in whose catchment area they reside

Known pupils who are enrolled for the next school year have either a current home address that is either within 0.9 miles of Palnackie Primary School (or shorter) or live outside the catchment area, so no current pupil for 2025/26 would be entitled to school transport if the school were to re-open/remain open.

6.5 Educational Benefits

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Head Teachers and their teams and allows them the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to adapt, think critically and flourish in an ever-changing global society. Individual Head Teachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. There are no specific educational benefits to reopening Palnackie Primary School as all schools implement Curriculum for Excellence ensuring effective learning and teaching which is matched to the needs of the children.

At the current time, the roll of Palnackie Primary School is five. The roll has decreased substantially over the past three years, and is not predicted to rise in the near future. The significant decline in numbers, along with the pupil number forecast, indicates a lack of stability for the school and wider school community, which may have a negative impact on staff, pupils and families.

6.6 Summary

This option is not recommended due to significant concerns about long-term sustainability, learner experiences, and the ability to meet statutory obligations for both learners and staff. If implemented, it would see the school reopen in August 2025 with a roll of three pupils, all within a single, multi-composite class led by a single teacher.

Community support for this option was limited. Only 15% of pre-consultation survey respondents expressed a preference to reopen the school. While two parents highlighted convenience and emotional attachment as reasons for support, the wider community largely did not favour this outcome. Comments in support often pointed to the symbolic and social value of rural schools but did not provide reasonable strategies for increasing enrolment or addressing operational challenges. Pupil projections remain critically low, with numbers forecast to reach only five pupils by 2026/27 and seven by 2027/28 - well below the threshold of ten or more pupils as per the current mothballing agreement. Of the 15 primary-aged children in the catchment, four currently attend Palnackie Primary School. There is no evidence to suggest that reopening would attract significantly more pupils.

From an educational standpoint, maintaining a single-teacher school with such a small age mix presents considerable risks to learner entitlements, including access

to peer socialisation, breadth of curriculum, and exposure to a range of teaching styles and experiences. This model also places a disproportionate burden on staff, increasing the risk of professional isolation and impacting recruitment and retention.

While Dumfries and Galloway Council acknowledges the role rural schools can play in sustaining community identity, the critically low pupil roll, absence of a clear pathway to viability, and the risks posed to both pupils and staff indicate that reopening Palnackie Primary School at this time would not represent an equitable or sustainable use of educational resources. As such, this option does not align with the principles set out in the Dumfries and Galloway Learning Estate Strategy or the Council's duties under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000.

7.0 Option B: Mothball Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment of Dalbeattie Primary School

Mothballing is defined as the temporary closure of a school without triggering a formal statutory consultation under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. It is only considered appropriate in limited and specific circumstances - typically where a school roll has fallen to critically low levels, rendering the school temporarily unviable, but where there is a reasonable expectation that pupil numbers in the area may recover in the future.

This option would see Palnackie Primary School remain mothballed from August 2025, with the school's catchment temporarily reassigned to Dalbeattie Primary School. The intention for this option would be to retain the possibility of reopening the school should future demand justify it (typically within 3 years).

It is essential that mothballing is not used to bypass the statutory requirements of the 2010 Act regarding permanent school closures. Mothballing must remain a temporary measure and should be reviewed on a regular basis (annually) using the same criteria that informed the original decision. While the duration of mothballing may vary based on geographic and community-specific considerations, national guidance indicates that it is generally not appropriate to continue mothballing for more than three years in areas that are not classed as very remote.

7.1 Community Feedback

6% of total respondents (2 out of 33) to the pre-consultation survey supported mothballing Palnackie Primary School.

This option saw low levels of support across all groups. Only 2 community members selected mothballing, and neither parents/carers nor staff supported it. No respondents submitted written explanations supporting mothballing, suggesting that it may be seen as a temporary or unclear option rather than a preferred long-term solution.

Comments on this option included:

"There is more houses getting built in the village hopefully families will be attracted to the school."

“Stop allowing children to other catchment areas, think outside the box to share children across schools. Have timeshares on lower attendance schools for the sake of community.”

7.2 Pupil Numbers

It is recommended that Palnackie Primary School should be re-aligned with Dalbeattie Primary School if it is mothballed or closed as a result of a potential future statutory consultation process. Dalbeattie Primary School is part of the Dalbeattie Learning Campus - a flagship school for Dumfries and Galloway Council opened in November 2017 at the cost of £26.5 million. The Learning Campus is made up of a Nursery, Primary and Secondary school and is a modern and fully accessible facility. Each element of the schools is rated A for both Condition and Suitability core facts. It is a Facilities Management (FM) contracted school which will see the school maintained to this high standard for future years. The Learning Estate Strategy emphasises the importance of utilising our assets and sets a target that schools should ideally be operating at 80% utilisation. Dalbeattie Primary School currently operates at 73% utilisation with 87 available pupil places.

Dalbeattie Primary School’s total capacity is 328 pupils. The forecast roll over the next three years if Palnackie Primary School catchment was to be re-aligned to Dalbeattie Primary School if mothballed from August 2025 would be as follows:

Figure 8

School Year	Predicted Dalbeattie Roll	Predicted Palnackie Roll	Predicted Combined Roll	Predicted Combined Utilisation
2025/26	237	3	240	73%
2026/27	241	5	246	75%
2027/28	217	7	224	68%

7.3 Financial Information

The education authority has a statutory duty to ensure that adequate and efficient provision of school education is made for its area, as set out in Section 1(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

At present, Palnackie Primary School is not mothballed, and as such, the direct costs associated with mothballing are not yet known. However, benchmarking data from comparable rural schools of similar size and building specification, such as Hutton Primary School and St Ninian’s RC Primary School, suggests that anticipated annual mothballing costs would be approximately £6378. These estimates are based on floor area, which indicate Palnackie is broadly in line with these comparators.

In terms of pupil transport, current analysis indicates that nine children residing in the Palnackie catchment area would become eligible for school transport to Dalbeattie Primary School from August 2025 in line with Dumfries and Galloway Council’s School Transport Policy. While this may result in increased transport expenditure, there may also be opportunities to achieve cost efficiencies through route optimisation and increased vehicle occupancy where capacity allows.

7.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

7.4.1 Community Impact

Palnackie Primary School sits within the Buittle Parish Community Council area. Buittle Parish lies to the west of the River Urr, between Dalbeattie and Castle Douglas, and extends from Haugh of Urr in the north to Almorness Point on the Solway Firth in the south. The Buittle Parish Community Council utilise the Palnackie Village Hall for community use.

A small number of respondents to the pre-consultation survey supported mothballing Palnackie Primary School as a temporary measure rather than proceeding immediately to permanent closure. Although only four respondents selected this option, the accompanying comments suggest that some within the community see value in maintaining the school in a mothballed state, pending potential recovery in pupil numbers.

Supporters of this option noted upcoming housing developments in the village and expressed hope that this would attract new families. One respondent stated: “There [are] more houses getting built in the village—hopefully families will be attracted to the school,” reflecting a belief that population trends may shift in the coming years. Another comment directly advocated for temporary mothballing: “Maintain (mothball) until potential pupil numbers rise again (as they will). We have enough designated retirement communities in Galloway.”

The potential community impact of mothballing was reflected in both positive and cautious terms. Some viewed mothballing as a constructive compromise that avoids permanent closure while allowing time to assess future viability. This view implies a continued sense of connection between the school and the local community, and a recognition that preserving the site for potential future re-use may soften the social impact of losing the school in the short term.

Others suggested a broader rethink of how small rural schools operate, including more flexible use of buildings and catchments. One comment proposed: “Stop allowing children to other catchment areas, think outside the box to share children across schools. Have timeshares on lower attendance schools for the sake of community.”

However, even among those who supported mothballing, there were undercurrents of concern about the uncertainty this creates for families and the potential for gradual disengagement from the school. One respondent asked, “If there [is] capacity at Dalbeattie School for future children?”.

In summary, community views on mothballing were limited but suggested that this option may offer a temporary balance between preserving educational infrastructure and responding to current low enrolment. While it would still represent a loss of daily educational activity within the village, mothballing was perceived by some as a less damaging alternative to full closure - allowing time to monitor demographic changes while retaining the possibility of reopening if conditions improve.

7.4.2 Travel arrangements

There would be required changes to school travel arrangements if Palnackie Primary School was to mothball from August 2025 and its catchment area temporarily realigned to Dalbeattie Primary School. This would see some current Palnackie Primary School pupils be eligible for school transport as stated in the policy below, but those pupils who are already choosing to attend Dalbeattie Primary School but live in the Palnackie catchment area may now also qualify for school transport. Dalbeattie Primary School is 3.3 miles from Palnackie Primary School.

The Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023 states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.

And

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- *To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*
- *To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

For school year 2025/26, there is expected to be 9 pupils living in the Palnackie catchment area who would be eligible for transport to Dalbeattie Primary School from August, with one child not eligible who currently resides 2.3 miles from Dalbeattie Primary School (and is over 8 years of age).

7.5 Educational Benefits

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Head Teachers and their teams and allows them the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to adapt, think critically and flourish in an ever-changing global society. Individual Head Teachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. Dalbeattie Primary School is co-located with a Nursery and Secondary school. The building was opened in 2018 and offers a brand new, state of the art facility. Children from Palnackie Primary, who attend Dalbeattie Primary School benefit from a curriculum design which supports their rural location and the skills and attributes to meet their individual needs and rural context.

Dalbeattie Primary School consists of 11 classes, some of which act as a dual composite where children are with peers from two year groups. The children benefit from a social context where they can build relationships, develop social skills, exercise responsibilities, meet challenges and develop resilience as members of a wider social group. They have the opportunity to influence the direction of the school and their learning experiences through a range of groups and pupil committees. At

each stage in Dalbeattie Primary School there is more than one pupil. As a result, they are able to build relationships with peers which in turn can support their transition into secondary education. Children also benefit from a Physical Education and Health and Wellbeing curriculum appropriate to their age and stage.

7.6 Summary

This option proposes that Palnackie Primary School remain mothballed from August 2025, with its catchment area temporarily reassigned to Dalbeattie Primary School, allowing for the possibility of re-opening should enrolment increase. This approach is recognised in national guidance as a temporary, non-statutory alternative to closure under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, to be used only in limited and clearly defined circumstances.

Current and projected enrolment at Palnackie Primary remains critically low, with only three pupils enrolled for August 2025, and a forecast rise to just seven by 2027/28, numbers well below sustainable operating levels. While there is planning permission for new housing within the village, projected pupil generation is modest, and the Council has not received any confirmed data regarding build timelines or guaranteed uptake. Based on current uptake (27%), it is unlikely that the new development would produce sufficient numbers to support re-opening within the next three years (the current agreement from Elected Members is schools should be considered for mothballing if the pupil roll is ten or fewer to protect learners' education).

Dalbeattie Primary School, as part of the Dalbeattie Learning Campus, offers significant advantages in terms of educational provision. It operates with a full complement of staff, ten classes (none of which exceed two year groups), a modern, fully accessible building, and enhanced transition arrangements due to its integrated nursery, primary, and secondary education provision. These features allow for a stronger delivery of Curriculum for Excellence entitlements, in line with the Council's duties under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, including the obligations to:

- Develop children's personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest potential (s.2(1));
- Secure continuous improvement in educational quality (s.3(2)); and
- Raise standards of education region-wide (s.3(3)).

The mothballing of Palnackie would also result in potential increased transport costs, as some pupils would become newly eligible for free school transport to Dalbeattie. However, these additional costs may be outweighed by the ability to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education, as required by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Community feedback on this option was limited, with only 6% of survey respondents (2 out of 33) explicitly supporting mothballing. Nonetheless, those in favour viewed it as a constructive compromise, one that retains the possibility of future re-opening while recognising the current unsustainability of operating the school. Some comments reflected optimism regarding future housebuilding and demographic recovery, while others promoted more flexible or networked models of rural education.

Importantly, mothballing would still result in a loss of daily educational activity within the village and carries some community risk over time, including disengagement or gradual physical decline of the site. National guidance recommends that mothballing should not exceed three years in non-remote areas and must be reviewed annually, with a clear and transparent rationale for any continuation beyond that period.

Option B is potentially a viable short-term holding position that allows the authority to monitor future demand without immediately progressing to closure. It ensures pupils receive a broader and more enriched education at Dalbeattie Primary School while preserving flexibility. However, the sustainability of mothballing beyond the short term remains uncertain and should no significant growth in pupil numbers materialise (which is the prediction on current data), formal consideration of permanent closure would still be required in future years.

8.0 Option C: Find an alternative use for the building (closure of Palnackie Primary School with the realignment of catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School)

This option proposes the permanent closure of Palnackie Primary School and the subsequent identification of a new use for the school building that meets local need and retains community value should the education authority have no further use for the building. Closure would follow the required statutory consultation process in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, after which the building would potentially no longer be required for educational use.

This option received the highest level of support in the pre-consultation survey, with 79% of respondents selecting “find an alternative use for the building” as their preferred course of action. While this support indicates an acceptance of school closure, it also reflects a proactive community interest in repurposing the building for future use. Suggestions from stakeholders included creating a community centre, youth facility, outdoor learning hub, or digital/start-up space, among others. This feedback reflects a desire to retain the building as a social, cultural, or economic asset, even if its educational function ceases.

Closing the school would formalise what is currently a temporary mothballing arrangement and would remove the administrative and financial uncertainty of maintaining a non-operational school. It would also enable the Council to make informed, strategic decisions regarding the long-term use of its property assets, aligned with principles set out in the Learning Estate Strategy, including optimising utilisation and maintaining buildings in a condition that serves the needs of local residents.

However, closure would represent a permanent loss of local educational provision and may be perceived by some as a further weakening of rural infrastructure. The Council must carefully balance this impact against the clear educational and operational benefits of consolidating provision within a better-resourced, higher-capacity school nearby.

This option represents a forward-looking response to community feedback, emphasising both educational sustainability and local regeneration through the potential adaptive reuse of a valued community asset.

8.1 Community Feedback

79% of total respondents (26 out of 33) supported repurposing the school building for an alternative use.

This was the most widely supported option, particularly among community members, with 24 out of 28 in favour. Comments from this group often reflected a pragmatic view that the school was no longer viable due to low pupil numbers, and several emphasised the importance of maintaining the building as a usable community asset. Suggested future uses included a youth centre, community hub, or IT space. Among parents/carers, 2 out of 4 also supported seeking an alternative use for the building.

Comment critical of this option included:

“All village children should go to the village school, not elsewhere.”
“Use the school as a forest school.”

“You should really have considered how you can operate these small schools together with some kind of timeshare, its easier to close them, but the easy way is not always the best one.”

“Let children share time between multiple schools so community schools can stay open.”

A further question in the pre-consultation survey asked respondents to suggest potential alternative uses for the school building. Comments on this question included:

“Community centre. Hostel. Youth centre.”

“For the local community to use for events and as a meeting place.”

“Art/Photography Centre. IT Hub.for start up business. Allow Community to use field for Community Activities.”

“Gym, soft play, museum of palnackie History”

8.2 Pupil Numbers

It is recommended that Palnackie Primary School should be re-aligned with Dalbeattie Primary School if it is mothballed or closed as a result of a potential Statutory Consultation process. Dalbeattie Primary School is part of the Dalbeattie Learning Campus - a flagship school for Dumfries and Galloway Council opened in November 2017 at the cost of £26.5 million. The Learning Campus is made up of a Nursery, Primary and Secondary school and is modern and fully accessible facility. Each element of the school are rated A for both condition and suitability core facts. It is a Facilities Management (FM) contracted school which will see the school maintained to this high standard for future years. The Learning Estate Strategy emphasises the importance of utilising our assets and ideally operated at 80%

utilisation. Dalbeattie Primary School currently operates at 73% utilisation with 87 available pupil places.

Dalbeattie Primary School's total capacity is 328 pupils. The forecast roll over the next three years if Palnackie Primary School Catchment was to be re-aligned to Dalbeattie Primary School if closed would be as follows:

Figure 10

School Year	Predicted Dalbeattie Roll	Predicted Palnackie Roll	Predicted Combined Roll	Predicted Combined Utilisation
2025/26	237	3	240	73%
2026/27	241	5	246	75%
2027/28	217	7	224	68%

8.3 Financial Information

The education authority remains legally responsible for ensuring the provision of adequate and efficient school education across the region, in accordance with Section 1(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Should Palnackie Primary School be permanently closed, it is projected that the Council would realise annual revenue savings of approximately £193,425 based on the 2023/24 financial year running costs for the school.

The closure of the school and the permanent reassignment of its catchment area to Dalbeattie Primary School would result in approximately nine pupils becoming newly eligible for school transport. While this could lead to a potential increase in transport-related costs, there is scope to identify efficiencies by integrating these pupils into existing routes serving Dalbeattie Primary. Where feasible, adjustments to service delivery may reduce the net financial impact associated with pupil travel.

8.4 Assessment of Rural Factors

8.4.1 Community Impact

Palnackie Primary School sits within the Buittle Parish Community Council area. Buittle Parish lies to the west of the River Urr, between Dalbeattie and Castle Douglas, and extends from Haugh of Urr in the north to Almorness Point on the Solway Firth in the south. The Buittle Parish Community Council utilise the Palnackie Village Hall for community use.

The proposed closure of Palnackie Primary School would represent a permanent removal of educational provision from the village, with pupils transferring to Dalbeattie Primary School, as per the temporary catchment alignment that would be introduced during the mothballing period. The loss of a local school is often felt keenly within rural communities, not only as an educational change but also as a symbolic and social shift in the fabric of village life.

Stakeholder feedback received during the pre-consultation phase reflected this complexity. While a majority of respondents (79%) supported school closure in

principle, they also emphasised the importance of securing a positive and proactive future for the school building. Many comments highlighted a desire to retain the site as a community asset, with suggestions for alternative uses including a community centre, youth hub, creative or digital enterprise space, or a venue for outdoor learning and inclusive support services.

These proposals indicate a strong local commitment to ensuring the building continues to serve a public function, even if that function is no longer educational. Some respondents expressed a view that, although the school's viability had diminished, the building itself remained well-placed to meet other needs - particularly those that promote social connection, lifelong learning, or other forms of support for young people. Others noted that closure would be a significant loss but accepted that sustaining the school under current circumstances was no longer realistic.

The closure may also be viewed by some as part of a broader trend of rural service withdrawal. In this context, it is important to ensure that any decision to close the school is accompanied by clear communication, community involvement in future planning, and where possible, investment in repurposing the site to benefit the area.

While the community impact of closure cannot be wholly mitigated, it can be managed and partially offset through meaningful engagement, responsible asset planning, and a willingness to explore how the building can continue to contribute to village life.

8.4.2 Travel arrangements

There would be required changes to school travel arrangements if Palnackie Primary School was to close and have its catchment area permanently realigned to Dalbeattie Primary School. This would see some current Palnackie Primary School pupils be eligible for school transport as stated in the policy below, but those pupils who are already choosing to attend Dalbeattie Primary School but live in the Palnackie catchment area may now also qualify for school transport. Dalbeattie Primary School is 3.3 miles from Palnackie Primary School.

The Dumfries and Galloway School Transport Policy 2023 states:

2.2 Dumfries and Galloway Council is required, by law, to arrange transport for pupils living out with a specified statutory distance from their catchment school. Parents are responsible for the first 2 or 3 miles of travel (depending on the age of the child) to the designated pick-up point for onward transportation to their catchment school.

And

Free school transport is awarded from the pick-up point for onward transportation:

- *To pupils under 8 years old who live more than 2 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*
- *To pupils who are 8 years old and over who live more than 3 miles from their catchment school by the shortest walking route.*

For school year 2025/26, there is expected to be 9 pupils currently living in the Palnackie catchment area who would be eligible for transport to Dalbeattie Primary School from August, with one child not eligible who currently resides 2.3 miles from Dalbeattie Primary School (over 8 years of age).

8.5 Educational Benefits

Curriculum for Excellence recognises the unique communities and contexts in which all our schools sit. It recognises the professionalism of Head Teachers and their teams and allows them the flexibility to design a coherent curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that their learners need to adapt, think critically and flourish in an ever-changing global society. Individual Head Teachers and schools are empowered to design and provide an enriched curriculum that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the diverse needs of individual learners and one which reflects the uniqueness of their local community and their context. Dalbeattie Primary School is co-located with a nursery and secondary school. The building was opened in 2018 and offers a brand new, state of the art facility. Children from Palnackie Primary, who attend Dalbeattie Primary School benefit from a curriculum design which supports their rural location and the skills and attributes to meet their individual needs and rural context.

Dalbeattie Primary School consists of 11 classes, some of which act as a dual composite where children are with peers from two year groups. The children benefit from a social context where they can build relationships, develop social skills, exercise responsibilities, meet challenges and develop resilience as members of a wider social group. They have the opportunity to influence the direction of the school and their learning experiences through a range of groups and pupil committees. At each stage in Dalbeattie Primary School there is more than one pupil. As a result, they are able to build relationships with peers which in turn can support their transition into secondary education. Children also benefit from a Physical Education and Health and Wellbeing curriculum appropriate to their age and stage.

8.6 Summary

This option proposes the permanent closure of Palnackie Primary School, enabling the Council and local community to formally explore alternative uses for the building. Closure would only proceed following a statutory consultation process in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. Once complete, the building would first need to be deemed no longer required for educational use and could instead be repurposed to meet other identified community needs.

This was the most widely supported option during the pre-consultation phase, with 79% of survey respondents selecting it as their preferred way forward. While this support reflects an acceptance of closure among many in the community, it also highlights a strong interest in ensuring the building continues to deliver value as a community asset. Stakeholders proposed a range of potential future uses, including a community centre, youth facility, outdoor learning base, creative hub, or small business space. These responses demonstrate that, although the loss of the school is significant, there is an active willingness among local residents to explore how the building can continue to serve the village.

From an educational perspective, closing Palnackie Primary School would enable pupils in the catchment to transition permanently to Dalbeattie Primary School, located within the Dalbeattie Learning Campus. This facility is modern, fully accessible, and was purpose-built to deliver high-quality education across nursery, primary, and secondary stages. Compared with Palnackie, Dalbeattie offers a more diverse and well-rounded educational environment. It currently operates with 11 classes, none of which combine more than two year groups, and provides broader socialisation opportunities, expanded access to extracurricular activities, and continuity of transition from early years to secondary education within the same campus. The school benefits from a larger, more diverse teaching staff with a wider range of skills and expertise. Its building has been rated 'A' for both Condition and Suitability and is maintained through a long-term Facilities Management contract that ensures high-quality upkeep.

These factors align with the education authority's duties under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, which require that education be directed to the development of each child's personality, talents and abilities to their fullest potential, that continuous improvement in educational quality be secured, and that all functions be exercised with a view to raising educational standards. The closure also supports the Council's obligation under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to ensure the provision of school education remains adequate and efficient. Given the school's persistently low enrolment and no clear evidence of significant future growth, it is hard to evidence Palnackie Primary School as a sustainable educational facility. While closure could generate increased transport costs, many of the pupils in the Palnackie catchment already attend Dalbeattie Primary School by parental choice. These pupils would become eligible for school transport under the Council's current policy if the catchment realignment became permanent and therefore considered a positive to those families.

It is acknowledged that permanent closure would result in the loss of local educational provision and may contribute to perceptions of rural decline. However, the Council's engagement process has revealed a constructive and proactive local response. The strong interest in alternative uses for the building suggests that, with appropriate support, the facility could continue to contribute positively to community life. Closure would allow the Council to plan responsibly for the long-term use of its estate, aligning with its Learning Estate Strategy by focusing on optimising the use, condition, and suitability of school buildings across the region.

In conclusion, Option C offers a clear and sustainable way forward. It enables pupils to access high-quality education in a nearby, well-equipped school while providing a genuine opportunity for the Palnackie community to redefine the use of a valued local asset. Balancing educational, financial, and community factors, this option represents the most appropriate long-term solution to the challenges currently facing Palnackie Primary School.

9.0 Conclusion

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

- Option A: Re-open Palnackie Primary School (5 stakeholders in favour)

- Option B: Mothball Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment of Dalbeattie Primary School (2 stakeholders in favour)
- Option C: Find an alternative use for the building (closure of Palnackie Primary School with the realignment of catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School) (26 stakeholders in favour)

An authority that is formulating a rural school closure proposal must satisfy the preliminary requirements set out in section 12A of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 as amended before starting to prepare its proposal paper. After consideration of the preliminary requirements, as set out in the Act, thorough exploration of the options, and having regard to the specific reasons identified in this report, Officers recommend closing Palnackie Primary School and realigning its catchment area with Dalbeattie Primary School is the most reasonable option.

Following a detailed appraisal of the three options -reopening, mothballing, or permanently closing Palnackie Primary School to seek an alternative use for the building - it is recommended that the Statutory Consultation in line with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 be undertaken for Palnackie Primary School.

This recommendation is grounded primarily in the educational benefits available to pupils. Dalbeattie Primary School offers a modern, well-resourced learning environment with significantly greater opportunities for social interaction, curricular breadth, and continuity of learning across early years, primary, and secondary education. As set out in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, the Council has a legal duty to ensure that education is directed toward developing each child to their fullest potential, and to secure continuous improvement in educational provision. The context at Dalbeattie more effectively fulfils these obligations than the current small-scale provision at Palnackie.

At present, Palnackie Primary School has a roll of only five pupils, with no evidence of a sustainable increase in enrolment in the near future. While mothballing offers a short-term solution, it does not address the fundamental challenges of low and declining pupil numbers, nor does it provide stability or long-term clarity for children, families, or staff. The reopening of the school under current circumstances would result in a single-teacher, multi-stage composite class with minimal peer interaction, limited curricular flexibility, and little opportunity for wider social or extracurricular development.

By contrast, Dalbeattie Primary School supports 11 classes within a purpose-built, state-of-the-art facility co-located with nursery and secondary provision. Pupils benefit from a broader peer group, diverse teaching staff, and more extensive enrichment opportunities. These conditions enable more effective delivery of Curriculum for Excellence and improved progression through the key phases of schooling.

In addition to the educational rationale, the community response to the pre-consultation survey overwhelmingly favoured identifying an alternative use for the Palnackie school building following closure, suggesting an appetite for community-led regeneration that retains the site's value in a new capacity. The financial savings associated with closure (estimated at £188,439 annually) also support a responsible approach to the management of the learning estate, in line with the principles of

efficiency, sustainability, and asset optimisation outlined in Dumfries and Galloway's Learning Estate Strategy.

In view of these combined factors - educational, financial, demographic, and community-based - Option C offers the most sustainable and forward-looking path. It ensures pupils receive the best possible educational experience, brings greater clarity and stability to families, and supports the broader strategic aims of the Council's education service.

Members are asked to:

- Note the community engagement undertaken as summarised in the Appendices below.
- Agree to the commencement of the Statutory Consultation process for the closure of Palnackie Primary School.

These recommendations will go to Education, Skills and Community Wellbeing Committee on 1 July 2025.

Appendix 1

Palnackie Primary School – Pre-Consultation Meeting 1

Date: Tuesday 13 May 2025, 6PM

Location: Palnackie Primary School

Facilitated by: Dumfries and Galloway Council Officers

Attendees: 3 x Parent/carers, 2 x school staff, 7 x community members

1. Introduction and Purpose of Meeting

- Officers welcomed 12 attendees to the public meeting.
- Officers explained the meeting was part of the pre-consultation engagement process, which is not statutory but may inform future decisions and is required in the act as a presumption against the closure of rural schools.
- The purpose was to present background information, outline next steps, and gather community feedback through discussion and a stakeholder survey.

2. Background to Mothballing Decision

- Officers confirmed that Elected Members had agreed to mothball Palnackie Primary School from August 2025 due to a projected roll of only 3 pupils.
- Previous engagement sessions (November 2024 and March 2025) had shown no parental support for mothballing, prompting this pre-consultation process.
- The current process aligns with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 Guidance, as amended.

3. Context and Demographics

- National and local demographic data was shared:

- Scotland is facing a declining child population, with a 22% drop in 0–15 year-olds projected nationally by 2045.
- Dumfries and Galloway is projected to experience a 14.2% decline in the same age group between 2018 and 2028.
- Local enrolment projections show minimal expected growth: 3 pupils in 2025/26, rising to 7 by 2027/28.

4. Survey Overview

- The stakeholder survey was introduced and distributed, available in paper and digital formats (QR code shared).
- It was open to all school and community stakeholders and would close on 28 May 2025.
- Participants were asked to share:
 - Whether they would enrol children at the school if it reopened
 - Views on the future of the building if it were to close
 - Ideas for increasing pupil numbers
 - Reasonable alternative to closure.
 - Other relevant community factors

5. Community Discussion

- Attendees expressed concern about the long-term future of the school.
- Questions were raised about how catchment areas influence school choice and whether families could be encouraged or required to send children to local schools.
- Officers acknowledged the importance of community voices and encouraged full participation in the survey.

6. Next Steps

- A follow-up public meeting was scheduled for 10 June 2025 to share survey results and outline possible next steps.

Appendix 2

Palnackie Primary School – Pre-Consultation Meeting 2

Date: Tuesday 10 June 2025, 6PM

Location: Palnackie Primary School

Facilitated by: Dumfries and Galloway Council Officers

Attendees: 2 Parents/carers.

1. Introduction

- Officers welcomed two attendees and presented the findings from the stakeholder survey.
- The survey received 33 responses from a mix of community members (28), parents/carers (4), and a single non-stakeholder (no direct relationship with school or community but still counted in the pre-consultation).

2. Survey Results Summary

- Catchment Residency: 29 respondents lived in the catchment area.
- Children Identified: 2 primary-aged and 2 nursery-aged children were identified within the catchment; these children were already counted in Council projections.
- Willingness to enrol:
 - 2 respondents said they would enrol their children if the school re-opened.
 - 2 said 'Maybe'.
- Preferred future for the school:
 - 79% supported finding an alternative use for the building
 - 15% supported reopening
 - 6% supported continued mothballing

3. Key Themes from Written Feedback

- Support for reopening centred on local access and family convenience, with emphasis on the school's emotional and practical value.
- Support for mothballing was minimal, with comments referring to additional numbers of infants or children through additional housing.
- Support for closure and repurposing highlighted:
 - Concerns about the building falling into disrepair
 - Desire for the space to serve a new community function (e.g., youth centre, IT hub, outdoor learning space)
 - Loss of the school contributing to broader decline of rural infrastructure
- Other comments raised concerns about:
 - Enforcement of catchment attendance
 - Future housing developments possibly boosting enrolment
 - Need for social infrastructure in a growing community
- Officers sought clarification of references to 'time share' arrangements for schools made in the survey feedback.
 - Attendees weren't sure, but through discussion it was agreed that emphasis should be placed on bringing pupils in small schools together more often to mix in larger social groups e.g., partnership school collaborative trips, events, sports day, enhanced transition etc.

4. Next Steps

- Officers confirmed there was little evidence to support pupil growth beyond a maximum 11 children in the next three years.
- Based on survey findings and discussions, a proposal for Statutory Consultation on permanent closure would be presented to Elected Members on 1 July 2025 for a decision.
- Summary of survey results and written comments will be included (with redactions) in the proposal appendix and the proposal paper will be available to stakeholders on the Council website (as a committee paper appendix).

Appendix 3

Online Pre-Consultation Survey Summary

An online survey was available for school stakeholders between 13 May until 28 May 2025, with paper copies made available at the public meeting as well as information on how to write directly to Education and Learning Directorate.

The survey received 33 responses. All feedback and comments from respondents have been collated and redacted to prevent identification of any individuals and are summarised below:

Demographics

- 33 responses total, with 29 living in Palnackie catchment including:
 - 28 Members of the community
 - 4 Parent/carers
 - 1 Non-stakeholder (no direct relationship with the school or community)

Parent/Carers with school/preschool age children

- 4 total respondents identified themselves as a parent or carer including:
 - Two parent/carers who have a Primary 2 child and nursery aged child;
 - One parent/carers with a Primary 2 child (non-catchment); and
 - One parent/carers with a Primary aged child and nursery aged child.
- Of those 4 respondents, two indicated they would enrol their child(ren) at Palnackie Primary School if it re-opened, and 2 responded 'maybe'.
- It is recognised that this response does not represent all children living in the catchment area.
- Of those 4 respondents, two wished for the school to remain open (including the non-catchment family), and two sought an alternative use for the building.
- Reasons given by the two parent/carers respondents who identified they would enrol their pupil at Palnackie Primary School included:
 - *“Palnackie is a great choice for my daughter and was chosen as it was easiest for childcare and my daughter loves the school.”*
 - *“A local school builds a local culture, my children meet people on the way old and young and get to know them. Parents who would normally isolate themselves are forced to step out of their comfort zones and meet other parents, helping them grow without realising. People grow up with each other. The hidden benefits are significant.”*

What should happen next?

- All 33 respondents answered this question, with the following breakdown:
 - 24 respondents (79%) wanted to find an alternative use for the building
 - 4 respondents (15%) wanted the school to re-open/remain open.
 - 2 respondents (6%) wanted the school to remain mothballed

If the school were to close, where should the catchment be realigned to?

- All 33 respondents answered this question, with the following breakdown:
 - 30 (91%) indicated Dalbeattie Primary School
 - 3 (9%) indicated Auchencairn Primary School

Is there anything you think Dumfries and Galloway Council could do to encourage families to enrol at Palnackie Primary School and help the school to reopen?

Common themes included:

- **Limit parental choice:** Several respondents felt the Council should enforce local catchment attendance more strictly.
“All village children should go to the village school, not elsewhere.”
“People shouldn’t have a choice of schools.”
- **Catchment enforcement:** There was a perception that allowing pupils to attend other schools undermines small rural schools.
“Should limit children to their catchment area—no excuses.”
- **Shared resources across schools:** One respondent suggested a flexible model where pupils attend multiple small schools.
“Children should time share across small schools.”

If a decision was taken to close Palnackie Primary School, do you have any suggestions on the future of Palnackie Primary School, including potential alternative uses for the building?

Common themes included:

- **Community space:** Many suggested turning the building into a multi-use community venue.
“Community centre. Hostel. Youth centre.”
“For the local community to use for events and as a meeting place.”
- **Creative and business use:** Some saw the potential for it to support local enterprise and arts.
“Art/Photography Centre. IT Hub for start-up business. Allow community to use field for activities.”
- **Support and education services:** Ideas included provision for additional needs and outdoor learning.
“An excellent centre for young people with additional support needs... also make a good outdoor activity centre.”

Please detail below any other significant factors impacting the local communities of Palnackie Primary School that Dumfries and Galloway Council should be made aware of.

Common themes included:

- **Loss of key community hubs:** Respondents noted that the school closure adds to the loss of other key village facilities.
“The school, pub and church are the heart of many villages, and we now have none.”
- **Community cohesion and social spaces:** Concern that losing the school would reduce community interaction.
“This closure will affect social meetings in the village and further degrade Palnackie.”
- **Future growth potential:** Some believe the closure may be premature given new families moving in.
“Palnackie is a thriving place with lots of infants due to start school in the near future.”