

Consultation on a proposal to close Fletching CE Primary School

Questions and Answers

Consultation process

Q. Is this really a consultation process or is it a done deal?

Is the consultation process open, fair and non-presumptive? Who is responsible for making sure that any consultation process regarding the school you want to close will be fair and credible – how will we know the process is fair?

A. This is a genuine consultation and we want to hear your views. No decision has been made yet. All responses received during the consultation process will be considered before a decision is made on whether to proceed with the statutory process to close the school. The consultation provides the opportunity to make sure nothing has been missed and see if there is an alternative option that could be considered that places the school in a secure, viable position.

The local authority has a duty to follow a prescribed process when consulting on the closure of a school. Under Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 a local authority can propose the closure of all categories of maintained school. In doing so a local authority must follow a statutory process set out in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 before making a decision on the closure of a maintained school. There are five stages to the statutory process which must be followed:

- Consultation
The publication of the consultation document on 5 July 2019 marks a period of consultation during which the views of interested parties are being sought and which will be considered by the local authority. The consultation period lasts until 11 October 2019.
- Publication
Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, the local authority will decide whether or not to publish statutory notices regarding the proposed closure.
- Representation
The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory notice and must last for a period of four weeks. During this period any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority which would be taken into account before a final decision is taken.
- Decision
Within two months of the end of the representation period the local authority must make a decision on the proposal.
- Implementation
If the proposal is approved, Fletching CE Primary School (Fletching) would close on 31 August 2020.

The local authority acknowledges that there is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and in the best interests of educational provision in the area. There are a number of factors set out in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 that must be taken into account when proposing to close a rural primary school; the local authority has had regard to these and will continue to take them into account during the consultation process.

As set out above, the local authority will consult with interested parties in accordance with Section 16(1) of the EIA 2006. All responses received during the consultation period will be shared with Cabinet colleagues who will consider the outcome of the consultation and decide whether to proceed with the statutory process to close Fletching.

Q. Who is the East Sussex County Council Cabinet and will they make the closure decision?

A. The East Sussex County Council (ESCC) constitution allows for either the Cabinet or the Lead Member to make the decision; the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability is Councillor Bob Standley. Cabinet is made up of the Leader of the Council and seven Lead Members, one for each service. For more information on ESCC Councillors and committee membership visit ESCC [‘Your Council’](#).

Q. What happens between the December and March dates?

A. If a decision is taken in December to proceed with the statutory process to close the school, a statutory notice would be published in early January 2020. This would trigger a four week representation period when interested parties can object to or comment on the proposal. At the end of the representation period the local authority has two months to make a final decision on whether or not to close the school.

Q. Why didn’t you start the process earlier with an informal consultation?

A. This is in effect an informal consultation. Should a decision be made to publish statutory notices the subsequent representation period would be considered a formal consultation. We engaged with schools earlier in the year through the area review process. If we had consulted with interested parties at that stage it would have had the same effect as the present consultation.

Q. Why was the timing of the consultation changed to run over the school holidays?

A. The consultation period was originally intended to run from 5 July to 27 September 2019. We have extended the consultation period by a further two weeks to reflect the school holiday. This provides interested parties with eight weeks of term time rather than the minimum recommended six weeks to engage in the process and for alternatives to be considered.

Q. Will you give the pupils a chance to have their say about the consultation?

A. We will arrange to come and speak to pupils at the school in September to ensure they have a voice. We will be mindful of any additional needs the pupils may have, particularly in relation to their mental health and wellbeing.

Q. How much say does the diocese have?

A. The Diocese of Chichester, as a key partner in education provision in East Sussex, has been fully involved in the reviews of rural primary school provision. Of the 68 rural primary schools in East Sussex 49 are Church of England schools. The diocese agreed that the local authority should consult on the proposed closure of the school. The local authority will listen carefully to the views of the Diocesan Board of Education before deciding whether to proceed with the statutory process to close the school.

The local area

Q. What do you mean by the Fletching area?

A. This is the community area used for admissions purposes. Every address in East Sussex is in a community area served by one or more schools.

Q. Where can details be found for the admissions area? Can a map showing the area be provided?

A. The details can be found in the admissions booklet by following this link [apply for a school place](#). A more detailed map is also included at the end of this Q&A document which shows the villages within the Fletching community area.

Q. Who makes the decision regarding the admissions area?

A. The local authority determines the admissions areas for all schools for which it is the admissions authority. The local authority consults on its admission arrangements every year and these are approved by the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability.

Q. Why are you telling us about the Fletching area if children at the school currently travel from outside the area?

A. The school relies on attracting pupils from outside its area to boost its numbers as local demand for places is very low.

Q. Of the 16 children who go to schools outside the Fletching area is it known why this is the case? Is it because of siblings? Some may have left because of the previous headteacher.

A. We do not hold information on why parents decide to apply for particular schools for their children. However we can see that not all families of children in the Fletching area apply for places at Fletching.

Q. Although 11 children are leaving from Year 6 there have been 22 in-year transfers. Two more children will be joining Year 5. Six children have been shown round the school even with the ongoing consultation. We do not believe your assessment that the school won't get to 70 is not accurate; there are currently 68 and six more children have been shown round.

A. We acknowledge that pupil numbers can fluctuate throughout an academic year as pupils leave or join the school, but it is important to use data from an official data source taken on the same day for every school. Using the official school census data released by the Department for Education (DfE) three times a year, we can see there was a net increase of only two pupils (from 70 to 72) at the school during the course of the 2018/19 academic year.

It is encouraging that families of six children have been shown round the school. Unfortunately that does not necessarily mean they will join the school. Our experience tells us that parents will look round a number of schools before making a decision about which one to apply for. Data provided by the school on 11 July 2019 about estimated pupil numbers for September indicates they expect there to be 67 pupils on roll at the start of the new academic year, with only five in Reception.

Q. How is the school's capacity determined? The school has never had 105 children.

A. The capacity of a school is determined by its accommodation, floor space and published admission number (PAN). Using the DfE's net capacity assessment form, the capacity at Fletching is assessed to be 105.

Q. Is it the case that big is beautiful?

A. The ideal minimum size in terms of provision and financial viability for a primary school is one form of entry (210 places). The DfE will not open new schools that are less than two forms of entry (420 places). There is a place for smaller schools in a predominantly rural county like East Sussex, but they have to be sustainable in terms of long term local demand for places which will in turn give them financial viability.

Finance and budgets

Q. What is the potential impact of the government's recent funding announcement for schools?

A. The government recently announced that in 2020/21 there would be 4% increase in a number of school funding rates (compared to 2019/20) that form part of a school's budget share. While we await more information from the DfE on the detail, an initial analysis by the Council of the potential impact on Fletching CE Primary School suggests that the school could see an increase in its budget share of approximately £2,500 in 2020/21. These estimates have been based on the current funded pupil numbers and do not take into account any fluctuation in these numbers. Therefore, these estimates will be subject to change when the 2020/21 budgets are calculated.

Q. Is this proposal merely about saving money, does closing the school save money for the Council?

A. The amount the local authority receives for schools funding is calculated by applying the Government's National Funding Formula (NFF) to each school in the county. Funding comes from the DfE via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Schools funding is not linked to the Council's revenue budget and the proposals are not driven by the Council making financial savings. We have been working closely with Fletching to try to address its budget challenges and have provided the school with additional funding in recent years.

Budget deficits are expected to be recouped from future year's school budgets. It is difficult to see how the predicted budget deficits at Fletching would be recouped; this year the school has predicted a deficit even though it had the benefit of carrying forward funds from last year. There is no scope for the school to cover its current costs and operate within its means. If the school does not address its budget deficit, the money could only be found from the overall resources allocated to schools, which would reduce the budgets of other schools.

The staffing budget in 2021/22 far exceeds the total budget share and is simply not sustainable. The budget is generated by the number of pupils on roll; the challenge for the school is about low pupil numbers. Without a significant upturn in pupil numbers it is difficult to see how the position can be reversed.

Q. You state that Fletching has the second highest percentage budget deficit of all primary schools in East Sussex. How does it rank in terms of the value of the financial deficit?

A. Fletching is the only school predicting a deficit in 2019/20 without a recovery plan. The deficit forecast by year three is the tenth highest in value terms, but second only to Broad Oak in percentage terms.

Q. Are all small rural schools facing the same problem? How many other schools are expecting to have a budget deficit in year three?

A. 15% of schools are forecasting a deficit in year two of their plans and 51% in year three. It is a common pattern to see a declining picture in a three year planning period. The size of deficit and scope for addressing it will inform the actual assessment of risk for individual schools. Plans submitted can vary greatly in approach; some will factor in all potential decisions that could be made to ensure a balanced budget, to demonstrate how resources can be managed. Some plans will forecast forward with current structures with no significant changes, this will highlight issues that need to be addressed. Often a plan with a year two or year three deficit is a catalyst to investigate options to ensure the deficit is avoided.

Fletching has been in this position for a number of years foreseeing a budget deficit. Significant changes have been made and further potential savings are now built into plans, however the school is still unable to submit a balanced plan and unable to identify any further savings. This highlights the predicted deficit as being a high risk.

Q. If Fletching has a deficit surely it will be a larger percentage as they are a smaller school? Larger schools receive more money

A. It is important to view a school's deficit in terms of percentage as this is a relative measure and gives an indication of the significance of the issue to the individual school involved. A school with a larger budget overall would have more potential to recover a deficit of the same size (i.e. a lower percentage of its overall resources available). For example a small school with a budget of £380,000 will find it harder to find £40,000 (11%) than a larger school with a budget of £1.6m and a deficit of £40,000 (2.5%). Schools receive a delegated budget and therefore only have the resources allocated, it is important that any deficit is put into the context of the overall resources available to the school.

Q. How do larger schools have more opportunities to address deficits? They have more pupils so have to spend more.

A. Most of the costs schools incur are fixed up to a certain point. As a very simple example if a school needs a teacher to teach 10 pupils, the same teacher could teach more pupils without costing anymore. If a school needs a photocopier it will cost the same to rent irrespective of how many pupils are in the school. All schools are different but in general larger schools have more flexibility to organise class sizes more efficiently and spread fixed costs further.

Q. Can staffing be looked at to reduce the cost?

A. The school has already made difficult decisions regarding reductions in staffing; no further options have been identified in this regard.

Q. Why is there such a large deficit in three years time?

A. A deficit in one year reduces the amount of money available in the following year. If the school is already struggling to manage within its resources a deficit carried forward compounds the issue. In 2018-19 Fletching had an in-year deficit (i.e. it spent more than it received) of approximately £30k. This has reduced its reserves so it has less to carry forward. A similar pattern forecast for 2019-20 will use all the remaining reserves and will result in a deficit being carried forward into 2020-21. There are a number of cost pressures particularly around staffing that are contributing to the situation. Increases in staff salaries, national insurance, apprenticeship levy and pensions have impacted on schools budgets for Fletching over a number of years. It is estimated that staff employed would cost approximately £15k per year more now than they would have three years ago due to these changes. It will cost approximately £6k more per annum to

cover the 2% unfunded pay award expected for 2019/20. All these costs compound year on year. This, combined with reduced funding due to lower pupil numbers, means potential for the deficit to grow is significant.

Q. How much of the school budget should be spent on staffing.

A. This will be different for each school and is subject to how costs are managed. The DfE quote that staffing costs of 70% of total revenue is a typical level, citing 80% as high. This is to be distinguished from the percentage of budget allocated figure which is often quoted in East Sussex and is typically around 80% to 85%. The total revenue figure can be useful as it acknowledges that some staff may be funded by specific grants (e.g. pupil premium) that lie outside of the delegated budget allocated to a school.

Q. You mentioned the increase in staffing costs including national insurance contributions. When did national insurance costs increase?

A. Employers National Insurance costs increased significantly in April 2016. This is when arrangements for contracting out of the State Pension ceased and standard contribution rates became applicable to all employers. Prior to this date, certain employers (linked to pension schemes offered) received an element of rebate (3.4%) for some contributions made and in addition paid a lower rate contribution (3.4% lower than the rate now in force) on a large proportion of payments made. This is a complex area and has a wide range of variables and implications but to illustrate the impact in simple terms, national insurance costs increase by approximately £5k annually based on current staffing at Fletching.

Q. Is the budget based on assumptions from the Council?

A. The school builds its own budget which is approved by governors. Financial advice and support is available for schools from the local authority and has already been accessed by the school. The local authority will issue standard advice based on best knowledge around future funding and how certain areas may be forecast. The uncertainty in all areas is highlighted and final assumptions regarding budgets are agreed at school level in this context.

Q. How are staff assumptions made?

A. Staff costs are planned on an individual post basis. The school will plan for the staff it currently has and any changes that are planned. A standard template detailed spreadsheet is issued to all schools which builds in current salary information and allows for modelling of increment and inflationary pay rises over three or five years.

Q. Who makes assumptions regarding staff pay rises and how are these calculated?

A. The local authority liaises with government bodies to identify as early as possible pay rises for teachers in the following academic year. The information obtained allows schools to use these recommendations to build budgets for the finance year that begins in April. The accuracy of these local authority recommendations is high. A spreadsheet is created with a formula to provide accurate calculations for each member of staff including National Insurance and pension costs. The school populates the spreadsheet with its planned staff information. Inflationary pay rises are built into the standard template spreadsheet at a default rate which can be altered if required. The default rate will be set in the spreadsheet issued and based on the most up to date estimate at the time of issue; this is usually significantly in advance of any agreement on pay rises having been made. For 2019-20 a 2% pay rise has been built in. The spreadsheet was issued in January 2019; as of 22 July announcements confirm that teachers pay will increase by 2.75% and a grant will be awarded by government to cover 0.75%. Therefore the assumption of a 2% unfunded pay award is correctly built in. Any pay increments due to individual staff will be built in by the school.

Q. Are the assumption made regarding pay rises similar across all schools?

A. The same spreadsheet is used across all schools with the same grading structures and standard settings.

Q. The Headteacher has recently helped Chailey St Peter's, has this disadvantaged Fletching? They offered help as the school considered it to be their Christian duty.

A. The headteacher of Fletching provides leadership support for Chailey St Peter's which Chailey St Peter's pays for. This supports the Fletching budget. The partnership with Chailey St Peter's does not adversely affect the budget.

Q. Can we revisit the budget?

A. It is for the governing board to revisit the budget.

Q. What deficit would be acceptable to county in order for them to stay open? Can the school have a licensed deficit to allow time to see if it could recover?

A. Due to the way schools are funded any deficit has to be recovered from future years funding. Therefore, schools are expected to present a balanced budget. In unusual circumstances where a deficit cannot be avoided in a given year the school can apply for a 'licensed deficit'. However this can only be approved if supported with a full recovery plan which demonstrates how the deficit will be recovered in the following years, up to a maximum of three years. Fletching governors have been unable to submit a budget that balances within this timeframe.

Q. Would 90 pupils make the school viable?

A. Each pupil brings new funding and a higher number of pupils generally helps viability. Each school's circumstances are individual and so this can only be answered with detailed modelling for the individual school, factoring in the planned structure to support 90 pupils. 90 pupils would help enable more efficient class sizes within the current structure. However, this can only be answered in full with detailed modelling including robust assumptions around how pupil numbers could be increased to 90.

Q. Can the budget deficit be plugged in different ways other than pupil numbers?

A. Yes. Alternative funding would have to be on a sustainable basis, guaranteed and without conditions to avoid the need for restructuring and redundancies each year.

Q. Has there been any independent financial advice sought regarding income?

A. This is the responsibility of the governing board, if they feel income generating strategies are a way to address the financial deficit.

Education provision including for SEN pupils

Q. What type of education will my child receive in a school that is closing?

A. The school would remain open until the proposed closure date and will continue to offer education and support to the pupils and their families in their care. The local authority would work with the school to support the transition of pupils to their new school. We recognise that this is a difficult and upsetting time for pupils and parents/carers.

Q. We have a high number of SEN children. The school's results do not take into account the number of SEN children. Fletching is an inclusive school and has taken children from other schools where they were made to feel unwelcome. The progress our children make is good. Their journey here is unique. It is not just about attainment but about the journey they make.

It is felt the school is where it should be in reading, writing and maths. The figures do not reflect the children with issues who leave the school with communication and life skills. The school is nurturing. Parents choose to come to the school from further afield because of its inclusiveness.

Other schools may be able to deal with the volume of children but they would not be able to accommodate SEN children in the same way as Fletching can. The costs will be higher in a larger school.

SEN children do better in smaller schools. Parents have moved to Fletching for this reason. EHCPs have not always been needed because the school provides so well for its children. If children are moved to larger schools and cannot cope they may need specialist provision. Has this been taken into account?

A. We do not under-estimate the impact Fletching has on its pupils with SEN. However, Fletching is a mainstream school and all mainstream schools are required to meet the individual needs of all their pupils, including those with SEN. We recognise that the school has an above average number of pupils with SEN and this will be considered as part of the consultation.

Schools want all pupils to thrive and have access to a range of support to help with their needs. This would be the case for pupils moving from Fletching. Resource is provided within a school's budget for additional needs. The needs are identified in relation to what is required in addition or what adjustments need to be made for the pupil to make good progress. Where pupils have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) the additional funding would follow the pupil to their next school.

For information, the percentage of pupils at Fletching with an EHCP is 1.4%. This is roughly similar to other schools in the local area which vary from 0.9% to 2%.

The identification of pupils with additional needs is a school decision making process and practice in terms of identification varies from school to school.

Q. Are you questioning the quality of education at Fletching?

A. No, the quality of education is good, however, the results are below national and East Sussex averages.

Q. Why are inadequate schools staying open when a good school could close? The data is one pupil away from national average and the quality of education is good. If you take data at face value it is not a true reflection of the school. Good progress is made.

A. Of the 62 schools included in the area reviews, 60 (97%) are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. There are several factors taken into account when considering the closure of a school, not just the quality of education. In Fletching's case the information and evidence from the review tells us that the school has been under-subscribed in each of the last five years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of the school's PAN each year. This means it is difficult for the school to be financially viable and to regularly have good outcomes for pupils. There is little in-area demand for places at the school.

All schools in the area surrounding Fletching are rated good or outstanding.

Data sources and housing

Q. Where do you get your population forecast statistics from? There are inconsistencies in your population forecasts for this area.

A. Short term pupil forecasts are based on actual GP registration data and Office for National Statistics (ONS) live birth data relating to children already born. The local authority's longer term pupil forecasts are derived from its population forecasting model (Pop Group Model). Each spring the five local planning authorities provide the local authority with updated housing projections and trajectories for each parish or ward in their District / Borough. This data is used to update the dwelling led population projections which appear on East Sussex in Figures (ESiF) and the Pop Group Model which generates these projections is used to derive local estimates of future births in the absence of GP registration and live birth data. This data is used to forecast longer term pupil numbers.

Q. The birth rate figures you predict do not match up and you are not taking into account housing developments. Is there planning permission for houses to be built in Fletching?

You claim there are only a few houses being built in the local area however, there are houses being built in Newick which is far closer than Chailey. There are also 1,000 homes being built in Uckfield.

Can we see the detail of how the housing developments and school places have been factored into the consultation presentation?

A. Our pupil projections take account of all housing proposals during the Wealden Local Plan period to 2028. Wealden District Council (WDC) provides ESCC with regular strategic data on housing completions and trajectories for every town and parish in Wealden District and this data was used to inform the area reviews. The most recent update was provided in spring 2019 and showed that only 8 new homes are planned in Fletching Parish during the Wealden Local Plan period between 2018/19 and 2027/28.

Our published pupil yields from new housing are provided in the chart below.

Pupil yield per new dwelling by property type and size	Houses 2 bed+	Flats 2 bed+	Houses / flats 1 bed
Primary schools	0.25	0.0375	0.00

Taking these pupil yields into account and assuming all new homes are houses with two bedrooms or more, we estimate two additional primary age children would be generated from new homes in the Fletching community area over a ten year period. Our pupil forecasts take account of these housing figures and the likely demand for school places they will generate.

Using the same pupil yields, the Ridgewood Farm development in Uckfield is estimated to give rise to up to 250 primary school aged children. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure the supply of places is in the right location to meet local demand. The development includes a site for a new school. The Council will ensure that there is sufficient provision locally in Uckfield to meet the need for places arising from the Ridgewood Farm development.

Q. The developer at the Ridgewood Farm development in Uckfield has said that they will not be building a new school.

A. An option agreement is in place for the developer to provide a school site and make a financial contribution towards local education infrastructure in Uckfield. The Council will ensure that there is sufficient provision locally in Uckfield to meet the need for places arising from the Ridgewood Farm development. The local authority would commission the construction of a new school building; the developer would not build it.

Q. Why build a new school if there is capacity in existing schools?

A. Developers would expect provision to be made in the area local to their development to help to promote the new homes. As stated above, the local authority must ensure there is sufficient provision locally to meet demand for places. Fletching is approximately five miles from the Ridgewood development. If Uckfield children could only access Fletching because there were insufficient places locally, the local authority would have to fund home to school transport for those children. Fletching is too small to accommodate all the children expected to be generated by the Ridgewood development.

Q. How can the local authority build a new school if they have limited funds available?

A. Capital funding for new school places comes from the DfE via the Schools Basic Need Grant and is supplemented by other funding such as developer contributions.

Q. Although there may only be eight new houses being built in Fletching there are lots of farms that have buildings that could be converted into dwellings. There is potential there.

A. Only eight homes are planned by WDC in the period to 2028. Other developments might come forward such as barn conversions, but we doubt that this would generate significant new homes. The pupil yield would still be low and would not address the shortfall in local demand for places.

Q. Lots of people are unaware that the school is there. The consultation has attracted parents to the school. Could anything be done to make the Parish Council change its mind regarding building new homes? Can you reverse the housing decision?

A. The decision on house building rests with WDC as the local planning authority. WDC has designated a large part of Fletching village as a Conservation Area. The north-west half of the parish, including most of Fletching village, is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The entire parish lies within the 7km zone of influence around the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation. This is relevant when considering what development is permissible in the parish.

School places

Q. Are places available in other schools? / You say there are spare places in local schools but I have contacted local schools and they have said they are full?

A. There are currently surplus places in a number of schools in the surrounding area to Fletching. There are also surplus places in other areas such as Uckfield where a number of pupils who attend Fletching live. As explained in the report to the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability on 24 June 2019, we propose to seek to increase the PAN number at Chailey St Peter's from 20 to 30 if the proposal to close Fletching is approved.

Pupil numbers fluctuate throughout an academic year as pupils join and leave schools. For this reason we recommend you contact the admissions team to check which schools have spare places. The team can be contacted on 0300 330 9472.

Q. Why is Newick CE Primary School over-subscribed? Why do they have classes of over 30?

A. While there is infant class size legislation for Reception and Key Stage 1, there is no legislation on the size of classes in Key Stage 2. Schools can go over PAN but normally for

specific reasons such as appeals, looked after children and EHCPs etc. Sometimes a school will exceed its PAN to accommodate a child moving into the area in-year.

Q. Parents received a letter which stated that every child would get a place at Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School. As part of the consultation it mentions that parents can express a preference for a place at Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School. Will our children be granted a place at Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School?

Can Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School accommodate 70 extra children?

A. Parents would be able to express a preference for a place at Chailey St Peter's or an alternative school if they wish. There is sufficient space at Chailey St Peter's for the school to accommodate an extra 70 pupils. The building would not need to be extended to facilitate this. It is proposed to consult separately on a proposal to increase the PAN at Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School from 20 to 30 should this prove necessary.

Q. How do you know that Chailey St Peter's will not go into deficit? We would not want to move our children there to find them in the same position.

A. Chailey St Peter's is a larger school than Fletching with a PAN of 20 which could grow to 30. The school is currently operating effectively with no deficit. Having additional pupils would put it in a stronger position.

Q. Would closing Fletching put more pressure on Chailey and Uckfield?

A. The decision to consult was made after reviewing all of the schools. As stated above it is proposed to increase the PAN at Chailey St Peter's if required. There are spare places in a number of schools in Uckfield.

Q. Why are other small schools not being considered for closure? There are so many small schools where will it end?

A. Clear objective criteria has been used to inform decisions (as listed below), the same criteria has been used to assess the situation of all schools.

- Quality of provision and outcomes for pupils
- School leadership
- Federations and collaborations
- Financial viability
- Pupil numbers and the level of surplus places
- Location of schools in relation to local pupil numbers
- Parental preference for schools
- Premises

East Sussex is a predominantly rural county, but so far only two rural schools have closed. The local authority is not 'working its way through the county closing schools' but we have a statutory duty to provide the right number of school places in the right locations. New schools are built where the housing has dictated they are required. When schools do close it strengthens the remaining schools as their pupil numbers increase.

Q. So it is not acceptable to send children five miles from Uckfield to Fletching, but it is acceptable to send Fletching children a similar distance to Chailey?

A. Children living in Uckfield have access to a number of good and outstanding schools locally without the need to travel to Fletching. Every home address in East Sussex is part of a community area served by schools/a school. Should Fletching close, the school's community area would need to be incorporated with another community area and we believe merging it with Chailey St Peter's would create more sustainable local provision for the area.

Q. Is it easy to get a child a place in a school outside of their area?

A. You are able to express a preference for any school. If the school has space it is likely that your child would receive a place. If the school is over-subscribed the admissions criteria would be used to determine who should be allocated a place. In the event of oversubscription within any priority, the allocation of places will be decided by prioritising applications on the basis of home to school distance measured in a straight line. For further information please refer to the admissions booklet available at: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schools/>

Options to closure

Q. Can Fletching CE Primary School federate with Newick CE Primary School?

A. That would be a decision for the governing board of both schools to make.

Q. Would other options be considered? The school needs to be promoted more.

A. Other options would be very welcome. The Headteacher noted that the highways authority had been approached to install a signpost to advertise the school; this was not possible as road signs cannot be used for advertising. The school is promoted along with all schools in the admissions booklet.

Q. Could the PAN be reduced?

A. Reducing the PAN would not make a difference. The school is already operating with three classes and is still predicting a deficit budget.

Impact on the community

Q. What about the impact of the school closing on the community?

A. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the consultation and decision making process to identify the equality implications of this proposal and any appropriate mitigation.

Home to school transport

Q. What guarantee will there be for reliable/free transport to other schools?

A. Free home to school transport would only be provided for eligible pupils who meet the criteria set out in the link below. From our initial analysis we believe the majority of pupils on roll at Fletching would have a shorter distance to travel to their nearest alternative school and would therefore not be eligible. At this stage the data tells us that fewer than ten pupils might qualify for home to school transport. The impact of any free home to school transport on the local authority's transport budget is expected to be minimal as there is already transport provision in place to a number of alternative schools. The criteria can be found on the East Sussex website at: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schools/transport/>

For information on whether your child/ren would qualify for home to school transport please contact the admissions team on 0300 330 9472.

Q. How far can we be expected to travel? Do you take account of travel time or travel distance?

The road outside Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School is not safe, will that be addressed?

Has the extra traffic that would be created by parents having to drive their children further to school been taken into account?

A. We will provide free transport between home and school if your child is eight years of age or over and lives more than three miles (4,828 metres) from the designated* school, or two miles (3,218 metres) if your child is under eight years of age. Distances are measured by the shortest available walking route using our Geographical Information System (GIS).

* The designated school is the school suitable to your child which serves your area, or if there is more than one school, the nearest suitable school to your home where a place is available.

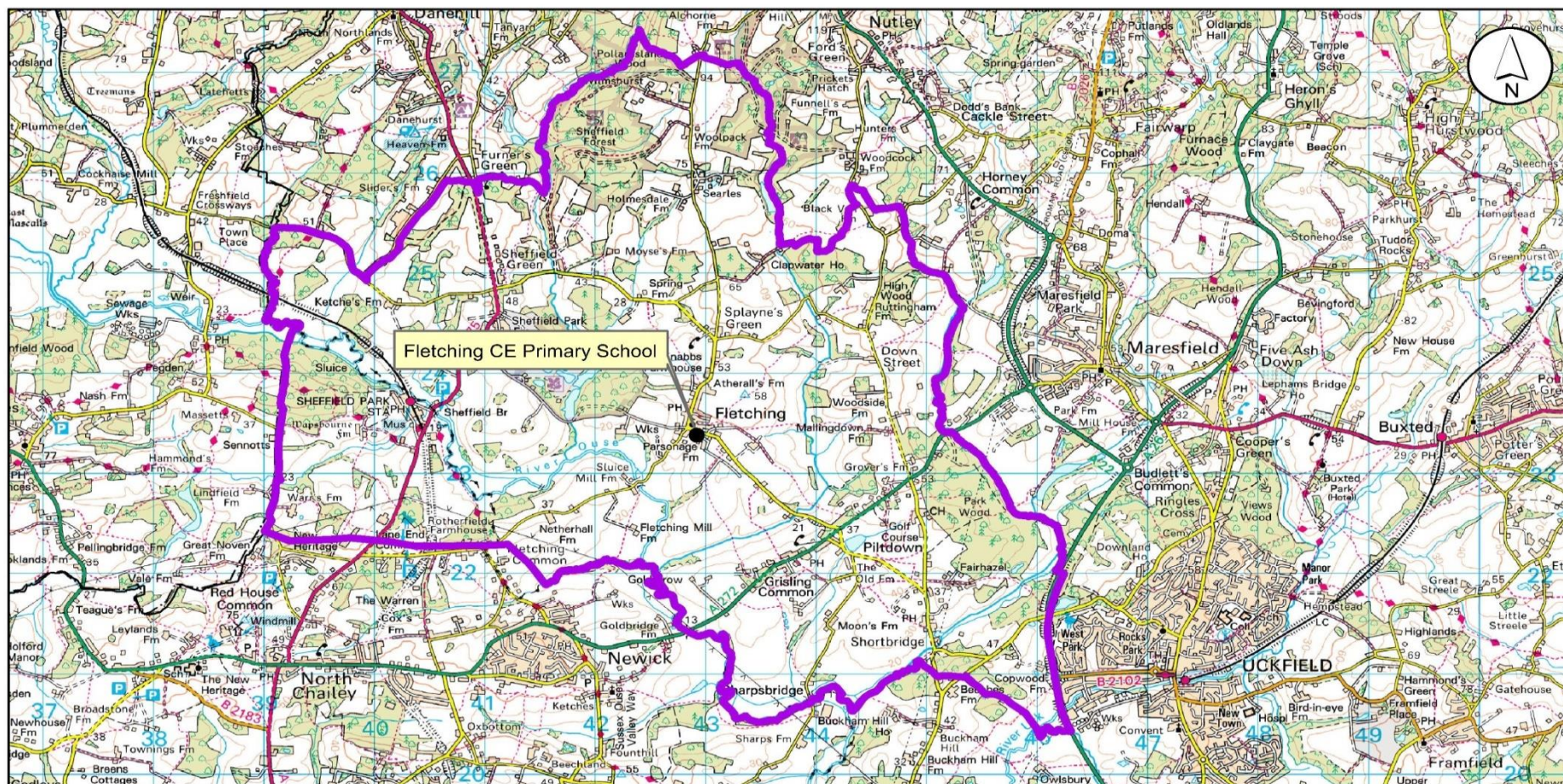
The effect of the proposal on travel and accessibility will be assessed as part of the statutory consultation and considered before a decision is taken on whether to proceed with the statutory process to close the school.

If the route to the new school is deemed unsafe then your child would automatically qualify for help with transport and the likelihood is that there is already a vehicle running to the school which picks up other passengers. This has been factored in to the initial analysis detailed in the body of the consultation.

Future of the school site

Q. Are you going to build houses on the school site?

A. As a voluntary controlled school, the site is owned by the diocese/trustees and the local authority (the diocese/trustees own the land encompassing the main building, the old school house and the hard play area). The local authority owns the playing field to the rear of the site. The future use of the site would be a decision for the diocese and the local authority. No consideration has been given at this stage to what might happen to the site should the school close.



East Sussex County Council

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Map showing the pre-defined community area for Fletching CE Primary School

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Date: July 2019

Scale: 1:50,998