

Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School Impact Assessment

May 2021



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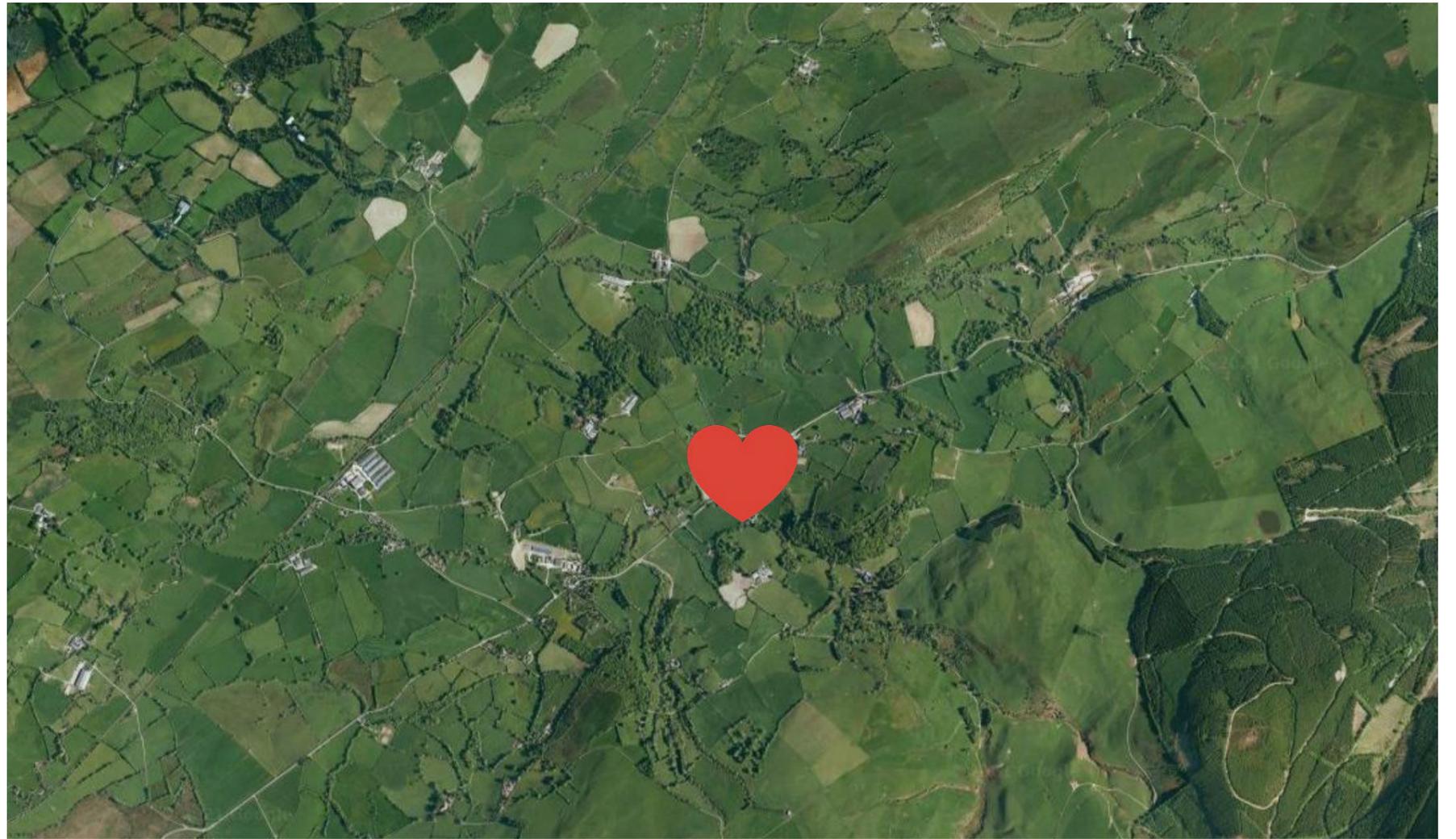
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the heart of the community

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT DOLAU SCHOOL

Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School, affectionately known as Dolau School, is a small rural school in beautiful Mid Wales.

The school has currently 37 children on roll and they are taught in two mixed aged classes.

The school has close links with the community through the Friends of Dolau School (FoDS), Dolau Community Centre and St Michael's Church in the village.

The school prides itself as being a friendly school with a strong "family feel" and an integral part of the community.



INTRODUCTION

ESTYN 2019 INSPECTION

“The school is a **happy, caring community** in which pupils thrive as confident, capable learners. Their behaviour in and around the school is exemplary. Most pupils make good progress in developing their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). **Pupils enjoy belonging to the school** and rates of attendance are consistently high. Teachers provide pupils with valuable activities that engage them and excite their curiosity. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning, and they are curious and eager to gain new knowledge and skills. **Leaders and managers have a clear vision** for the future of the school. They set high standards and ensure that they deploy the school’s resources efficiently”.



INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Powys County Council has again brought forward a proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon school, this was last put before the Authority's Cabinet in 2016 and the proposal was rejected by full Council. It is very concerning that the whole world is emerging from the Covid 19 pandemic and Powys County Council feel the timing of this decision to consult on this proposal is correct. This is very questionable, can this be a full and robust process when reliant on a digital consultation, when there will be many people in the community who will have poor internet connectivity or no access whatsoever?

The current proposal is "To close Llanfihangel Rhydithon School from the 31st of August 2022 with Pupils to transfer to nearest alternative schools." Following the rejection of the proposal to close the school in 2016, the Welsh Government's Minister for Education amended the School Organisation Code, a statutory code. It states that the "Presumption against the closure of rural schools."

This second edition of the Code makes special arrangements for rural schools (defined within the Code), establishing a procedural presumption against the closure of rural schools. This requires proposers to follow a more detailed set of procedures and requirements in formulating a rural school closure proposal and in consulting on and reaching a decision as to whether to implement a rural school closure proposal." This means that closing a rural school should only happen after councils have done "everything they can" to keep it open. Llanfihangel Rhydithon is listed as a rural school within this document.

Having studied Powys County Council's proposal from 2016 and the proposal being put forward now at length, there is no new information or redefined need to continue with the proposal at this stage. Welsh Government have also used Llanfihangel Rhydithon School as an exemplar rural school, fully supported by Powys County Council.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school has increased in pupil numbers and is projected to continue to do so. It was inspected by ESTYN in 2019 and was categorised as good in all elements of the inspection. All the schools listed by the local Authority as "the nearest alternative school" are consistently achieving lower ratings than our school, with poorer attendance and lower achievements.

In 2019, ESTYN inspected Powys County Council Education Services and concluded that Powys local government education services were causing significant concern and progress was slow, and therefore required follow-up. The Council carried out a strategic review of schools during 2019- 20, which led to the development of a new Strategy for Transforming Education in Powys. The strategy sets out a Vision Statement and Guiding Principles which will underpin the Council's work to transform the Powys education system over the coming years.

The 'Transforming Education Vision Statement' (March 2020) is as follows: All children and young people in Powys will experience a high-quality, inspiring education to help develop the knowledge, skills and attributes that will enable them to become healthy, personally fulfilled, economically

productive, socially responsible, and globally engaged citizens of 21st century Wales.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is achieving everything that the Authority aspires to in its vision. As a County, Powys has an aging population and has difficulty in retaining its young people with little or no higher education facilities such as universities, it is also proving difficult to encourage the leavers to return. As an Action Group we have approached surrounding communities to explain the effect they have felt going through the process of enforced school closure.

The past pupils of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School had a solid, inspired and most importantly an enjoyable educational base to build on. Many have returned to the County and there are a high percentage of professional, economically productive, and socially responsible members of the Powys population. In comparison with other rural areas where their school has been forced to close. The current and future pupils will also benefit from the proven overall ethos of the school.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school has past pupils working throughout Powys as Entrepreneurs running their own businesses and employing local people supporting the local circular economy. There are Civil Engineers, Solicitors, Architects, Police Officers, Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors working within the Public and Private sectors in the County. Past pupils volunteer in many varied roles across the County and some have also undertaken socially responsible roles within Powys's political structure at a Local and County level.

ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF POWYS CC

VISION 2025

Introduction

In July 2017 Powys County Council launched Vision 2025 identifying four priority areas of work: Economy, Health and Care, Learning and Skills, Residents and Communities, and six equality objectives in line with the well-being goals set out by the 'Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015'

“By 2025 Powys will be widely recognised as a fantastic place in which to work, live and play”.

Dolau is a fantastic place to work, live and play as are the six surrounding Community Council wards served by Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. This area is popular and competitive within the housing market in comparison to areas with no primary school provision.

The Economy - We will develop a vibrant economy.

The enforced closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School will have a detrimental effect on the local and wider economy in Powys. Local Estate Agents have stated that children's good early years education is a highly sought-after requirement when professional people are looking to relocate themselves or their businesses to Powys.

Many of the residents of this area work in the larger towns such as Llandrindod Wells or Newtown. Closure of the school will have a detrimental effect on the housing market as well as the potential workforce in a significant area of Mid and East Radnorshire.

Powys County Council's booklet "Move to Mid Wales, Discover Powys" supports the Council's vision to encourage people and businesses to relocate to the County, citing high quality education as "There are many nursery, pre-school and childcare options in Powys to suit your needs. Throughout their learning, Wales' Curriculum encourages your child to develop their interest, build on their strengths, and learn in creative and encouraging settings". Yet Llanfihangel Rhydithon school is under threat, being categorised by ESTYN as good school in all categories and highly commended Welsh Government.

Growing Mid Wales is a transformational project for the Council and will see the development of a Mid Wales Growth Deal, circa £200m. Llanfihangel Rhydithon and the border areas lends itself well to integrated schemes with partners on the English side of the border such as the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership to develop tourism and other opportunities, although no educational provision may hinder any aspirations.

It is a proven fact that more people, post COVID, are seeking a rural life, at a younger age rather than when they are 65. It is hard to see people being encouraged to move to East Radnorshire without a rural school.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF POWYS CC VISION 2025

Health and Care - We will lead the way in providing effective, integrated health and care in a rural environment.

Although this well being objective is focussed on social care, it is actually very relevant to the health and wellbeing of the current pupils. They are currently going through the Covid pandemic and now the potential of being removed from their friendship groups and familiar surroundings to be placed in an alien environment, expected to make new friends, and establish new relationships with their teachers and the support staff as the nearest receiving school proposal will impact greatly on the individual pupils. This proposal is based on the location of the family home.

School closures also lead to an aging community as younger people and families look to locate in vibrant communities and these are those with the school at the heart of the Community. This will have a long term budgetary cost to the Authority with additional supportive social care.

It is difficult to assess the impact on mental health and wellbeing of the wider community, as the effects of the school closure can be felt over the months and years that follow. No long-term assessment of the implications has been undertaken by the Council.

To raise awareness of the proposal to close Llanfihangel School and in an effort to highlight the number of small schools which have been closed in Radnorshire in recent years, The Dolau School action group, with the help of children from Llanfihangel Rhydithon Primary School have

created scarecrows as visual props to spread the plight of the school, far and wide.

Learning and skills - We will strengthen learning and skills.

If the Authority implement the enforced closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon school, it will mean that pupils currently attending Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School would transfer to their nearest alternative schools. Dolau school has been categorised as good in all elements by ESTYN in 2019. All schools named as the nearest school and as such the potential receiving schools within the proposal documents are all categorised lower than Llanfihangel Rhydithon School.

It is concerning that the proposal papers are dismissive of this fact, stating that there are no concerns in relation to quality and standards, and the Council's view is that provision for pupils would be at least equivalent to the current provision. Surely if this were factually correct the schools listed would be categorised the same as Llanfihangel Rhydithon school, this is misleading and raises great concerns that the Authority does not take ESTYN and its requirements seriously.

It also suggests that Powys County Council has little or no regard for the educational achievements of the County's schools.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF POWYS CC

VISION 2025

The proposal paper states that larger number of pupils and a larger team of staff, could have a positive impact on the opportunities available for pupils and staff.

A school like Llanfihangel Rhydithon allows all pupils the opportunity to participate in team sports or other activities and each pupil is given the chance to shine on the sports field and the stage, giving a solid grounding of self-esteem and self-worth, holding the individual pupil in good stead to take on life's challenges.

A smaller school does not choose the best footballers, actors or musicians but encourages all pupils to participate. The community impact assessment details all the activities undertaken at the school, that are equal to or more than other schools in the area.

Residents and Communities - We will support our residents and communities.

The proposal to enforce closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon school does not support the residents and communities of Dolau and the surrounding area. This action will have an impact on the community over many years to come. Villages in the area, who had their schools closed many years ago, are now mainly aging populations, with issues of rural isolation and little or no community activity.

Dolau school is the last remaining rural school in a large area of Powys, covering East Radnorshire. This area seems to have been historically chosen for the forced closure of its

schools in comparison with other areas across the County. Removing the school provision in Llanfihangel Rhydithon will leave East Radnorshire as a remote area of the County that will require interventions to reduce the rural deprivation and increased social care needs over years to come.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school is the heart of the Community and this is reflected in the fundraising achievements of the PTA, Friends of Dolau School (FODS).

In comparison to the named nearest receiving school, Crossgates, there has been significantly more monies raised in Dolau. For a school approximately a third of the size, the Community actually raised three times the funding to support the school, in 2018, there was £5,400 raised in Crossgates and £13,950 in Dolau.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF POWYS CC TOWARDS 2040 - THE POWYS WELL-BEING PLAN

This is the plan setting out what the Public Service Board wants Powys to look like in 2040, contains 4 local objectives and 12 well-being steps to achieve those objectives.

The document emphasises the need to retain Llanfihangel Rhydithon school as a key rural school in Powys. Its ethos and attitude towards the pupils, staff and wider community are actually already fulfilling the future aspirations of this policy in so many ways:

- More people will move to Powys recognising it as a great place to live and raise their families boosting our school pupil numbers and community capacity.
- Children will enjoy a positive childhood experience and are ready to learn when they enter school.
- Schools will offer pupils, of all abilities, a more flexible teaching approach ensuring everyone has the best possible school experience, achieves their potential, and can move forward with their lives.

In the 'Towards 2040, the Powys Well-being Plan' it is stated 'People in Powys will experience a stable and thriving economy' by 2040. We cannot see how 'Powys will be a prosperous county with a well educated and skilled local workforce where opportunities exist for all and everyone can reach their full potential, reducing poverty and deprivation.

Powys wants to experience a stable and thriving economy and to be prosperous with a well-educated and skilled local workforce, where opportunities exist for all and everyone can reach their full potential.

We need to strengthen our economy, our high streets, and showcase fantastic local products and skills, and support local pubs, shops and cafés.

It was noted in the report that Powys should be 'recognised as a great place to live and to raise families, therefore boosting school pupil numbers and community capacity'. It is hard to imagine young professionals coming back to Powys, settle down and start families, if you close the small rural schools that are the heart of many communities.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF POWYS CC

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Powys County Council's 21st Century Schools and Education Programme represents a £200 million investment programme. The funding is made up of Welsh Government grant and Powys County Council capital borrowing and the sale of any potential surplus assets.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon School will become a surplus asset if the enforced closure goes forward. However, Dolau Recreation Association has a 99-year lease, signed in 1997 with 75 years remaining. This lease gives the users of the Community Hall access to the area around the school and the playground as a car park. There is no defined area that cars need to park away from the school building or any time restrictions, but the Community and school have an understanding that works very well.

The Building itself does not lend itself to alternative use as living accommodation easily. It may be suitable a workshop site, although the Council appears to be rationalising its workshop portfolio. Similar buildings have been historically given to the Community for £1 or sold for minimal amount on the open market and have then left to decay. There will be little or no investment for the 21st Century Schools program from this proposal.

The primary aims of the programme are to:

1. Reduce the numbers of poor condition school buildings
The Council has openly stated that Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is in a good condition. Therefore, it does not meet this aim of the programme and perhaps the focus should

be turned to those schools that have structural issues in comparison.

2. Reduce surplus capacity

Llanfihangel Rhydithon does not have surplus capacity and it is slightly over its allocated number of pupils, and pupil number are profiled to continue to risk of forthcoming years. The school actually reduced the allocated teaching space by making an area of the classroom into a storage/administration area. This was on the questionable advice of Council Officers to reduce the vacant pupil numbers, this can easily be rectified and returned to its original usage by the Friends of Dolau School at no cost to the Authority. The school numbers rise in forthcoming years so this will be needed.

The documentation produced by the Council, shows that the nearest alternative schools as the receiving schools do have surplus places, it seems very dubious to enforce a school that has a high standard of education, full capacity and a solid and sound building to close to help support the reduction of the Council issues in other areas of the County.

If you look closer at the pupil numbers at these receiving schools, Llanbister school is over capacity of 135.6% and is anticipated to rise in next few years and Trefonnen is at 110.1%. This makes it unviable for our children to attend their nearest alternative school. By the Council's own admission Crossgates C.P. School is the only school with sufficient capacity. There appears to be alternative plans to increase the pupil numbers in this school and it is fundamentally



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF POWYS CC

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

wrong to give the perception that there is parental choice if the enforced closure goes ahead. Crossgates C.P School is constantly achieving lower results and is categorised lower than Llanfihangel Rhydithon by ESTYN.

3. Reduce running costs to maximise resources available to target improvements to learner outcomes

The figures produced by the Authority show Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is slightly higher than the average cost per pupil but there are no two schools the same. Llanfihangel Rhydithon School has a very competent Governing Body, that work closely to the Authority and has consistently produced a surplus budget that provides a good education and environment for all the pupils and staff at the school.

Schools receive their budget allocation based on their local authority's formula. It was stated in the Llanfihangel Estyn report in March 2019 that 'The executive headteacher and governors work closely together to provide strong financial management and ensure that the school receives good value for money in the purchases it makes'.

Following the last attempt to enforce closure of the school, Llanfihangel Rhydithon school has been affiliated with Llanelwedd School under the leadership of one Headteacher. This has worked very well and is something the school would like to formalise, but Council Officers seem reluctant to do so.

The SWOT analyses within the Authority's consultation document describes, Llanfihangel Rhydithon is as a standalone school and a threat shown is the ability to recruit/secure headteacher in small school. This does not reflect the true position of the school's management and the substantial savings made in 2016.

4. Address specific demand for place in Welsh medium and Faith Based provision – East Radnorshire is not an area that uses the Welsh Language as its first language.

Through the school, pupils have positive attitudes towards learning Welsh. In the foundation phase, many pupils use Welsh phrases informally, without being prompted. In the Estyn report it was noted that the school needs to 'Improve key stage 2 pupils' ability to speak Welsh'. The school is addressing this recommendation brilliantly.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon is a second language Welsh school, the teachers and support staff integrate the Welsh Language into the school day, and it is a proven solid basis for pupils to continue with the Welsh Language throughout their further education and career paths.

To enforce closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School to strengthen the Welsh medium and Faith Based provision, when the school is meeting the needs of its pupils' and the wider community alike, does question the equalities agenda and is verging on positive discrimination by the Authority.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF WELSH GOVERNMENT

EDUCATION IN WALES: OUR NATIONAL MISSION, ACTION PLAN 2017–21

One of the key actions in Education in Wales: Our national mission, Action plan 2017–21 was to 'reduce infant class sizes, targeted at those who will most benefit, supporting teachers to raise standards for all', which appeared very successful. It's a matter of logic: smaller schools typically have smaller classes, and low teacher-student ratios translate into more focus on your child and his education.

Long-term close relationships between pupils and teachers allow for closer match of the learning to the child and for greater commitment by both the child and the teacher to each other. This in turn helps with closely focussed revisiting. Parents want their children's confidence to grow in a small rural school, rather than in a larger hub primary where children travel miles on public transport to larger classes and year group segregated teaching. Children thrive in small schools and the teachers provide 1:1 guidance.

The Welsh Government stated it was committed to 'raising education standards in rural areas', in the Rural Education action plan 2017. As parents and community members, we are in agreement with the Welsh Government that every learner in Wales, wherever they live, has the right to benefit from high-quality education and the opportunity to reach their full potential. The School Organisation Code was strengthened in respect of a presumption against the closure of rural schools.

In the 'Rural education plan' 2017 there are three themes stated:

- Theme 1: Strengthened organisation and support for rural schools
- Theme 2: Supporting equity and excellence in rural schools
- Theme 3: Supporting rural schools as community and educational spaces

Theme 1: Llanfihangel Rhydithon had a part time (half day per fortnight) business manager for one academic year, as part of a pilot. As her time was diluted due to being shared with 5 other schools this had very little impact.

Theme 2: Llanfihangel Rhydithin were successful in a bid for 2 terms of increasing responsibility for a member of staff to be promoted to acting assistant head. However, this grant was not sustained, and it was not continued.

Theme 3: Llanfihangel did benefit from improved connectivity. They use HWB (as do all primary schools in Wales) and Google for Education. Lastly they also have access to behavioural/pastoral support worker (shared with 10 other schools). This was largely accessed by larger schools and was cut short due to the post holder leaving to take up a post elsewhere.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF WELSH GOVERNMENT

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

The Welsh Government Well-being of Future Generations Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities, and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

There are seven Welsh Government Well Being Goals.

A prosperous Wales - An innovative, productive, and low carbon society.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school is proud to be a green ECO school, and has for many years has educated their pupils on the effects of climate change and its carbon footprint. Since 2015, the school has been recognised for its achievements, most recently the school was categorised as green, the highest Welsh Government standard, even Covid has not stopped the school's commitment with the Children home working on Eco topics.

A resilient Wales

Welsh Government sees a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment. The proposal to enforce the school closure adds to the County's carbon footprint as many more pupils will have extended journeys to school, this contradicts the fact that Council declared a climate emergency on 24th September 2020 setting an ambition to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero, in line with the Welsh public sector. Additional travel by parents

who require their children to attend the out of hours school activities also increases the cost of individual families, increasing fuel poverty and the counties carbon footprint.

A healthier Wales and A Wales of cohesive communities

A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood within attractive, viable, safe, and well-connected Communities.

The implementation of the proposal to enforce closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School, with pupils transferring to alternative schools would have a negative impact on the mental well-being of pupils, staff, and the wider community. There is no understanding of the long-term effects of the enforced closure of a rural school on the pupils, staff, and local and wider community as no study on either the long or short-term impacts has been undertaken.

As an Action Group we have contacted Communities who have had their schools closed and the impact is a slow decay of community cohesion, sense of place and wellbeing that can be felt decades after the enforced closure.

Although, Powys County Council states it will provide support through the process, there has been no evidence of a pro-active approach to the issues of the communities left behind once the school has been removed.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF WELSH GOVERNMENT

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school is the heart of the Community, should the school close then many other communities' activities would cease instantly. There is a strong parent and toddler group, and the preschool Cylch Meithrin which is held on the site and has good links with the Foundation Phase.

These are vital to the success of the school but would naturally disperse as the children would have to attend their nearest school as their receiving school. Again, some of the facilities and activities at the nearest school or receiving school actually rate as lower than Llanfihangel Rhydithon by the relevant governing body.

Dolau Recreation Association manages the community hall, the hall would struggle very quickly given the loss of income from the school use and the income from associated groups such as pre-school and the Friends of Dolau School. Community cohesion would soon be under pressure and issues of rural isolation and wellbeing would escalate as other activities would be limited as the Friends of Dolau school are a driver in organising social fundraising events in the hall.

A globally responsible Wales

This well being goal focuses on improving the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales. Fundamentally the Councils statement that "the principle of implementing the proposal is to provide the best possible opportunities to learners, enabling them to reach their full potential" is incorrect as each school named as the nearest

school or receiving school has a lower record of attainment, lower attendance, and lower ESTYN inspection status. Leaving the pupils in their current environment, with high quality education in secure and safe surroundings should be a priority for the Council.

The socio-economic effect of an enforced closure will be detrimental to the local housing market, employment opportunities and the uniqueness of the East Radnorshire way of life will be further weakened.

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School is classed as an English medium school; however, it is committed to educating its pupils with Welsh as a second language. Teachers, support staff and pupils integrate the Welsh language into the school day as a natural part of their activity and this approach has led to parents also undertaking Welsh classes to support their children. This approach gives the pupils a solid basis to further develop their abilities.

The school is not only very proud and proactive in promoting its own ethos and culture as a school, but also the history and culture of the area and Wales.

There appears to be a perception that larger schools potentially give additional opportunities for pupils to take part in sport, art, and other extra-curricular activities.



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF WELSH GOVERNMENT

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

However, this is not the case Llanfihangel Rhydithon as other smaller schools, provides a wide and varied programme of extra-curricular activities and being a pupil at a smaller school gives the opportunity to all, it is not competitive choosing only the strongest netball or football player, the best singer or most confident speaker for the Christmas play but allows all pupils to gain confidence and skills by giving all the opportunity to take part in all activities.

Smaller schools operate more like a community than a corporation. We have a greater sense of unity and belongingness, shared by the parents and staff/committee members/governors alike. Children do not go unnoticed.

This close-knit feel enables more opportunities for kids to participate. In larger schools and clubs, competition is fierce for the sought-after few spots on teams; those pupils/members who make the team gain a personal investment in the school, while those who don't make the teams—and their families, by extension—can feel side-lined.

In smaller schools the chance for student participation is recurrently higher because students are required rather than redundant; as a result, children in smaller schools/clubs and their families have more of a stake in their school/club.

A more equal Wales

A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background and circumstances). This document has incorporated the key protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, sex, and sexual orientation.

The small rural school of Llanfihangel beneficial from a social standpoint—fewer students in the room make class participation inescapable, but also usually less intimidating.

The size of Llanfihangel promotes belongingness and it becomes difficult for kids to go unnoticed and slip through the proverbial cracks. The school encourages pupils to be accepting of the way people are such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The school does not have a tiny mind. Its inclusive of protected characteristics and promotes different learning styles and abilities. Smaller numbers of students, a more intimate and personalised learning environment, and a cohesive vision among teachers.

Having read in detail the Council's draft assessment, April 2021, each and every answer to the key characteristics is a rewording on the statement "The proposal aims to provide improved educational opportunities for all affected pupils."



ALIGNMENT WITH POLICIES OF WELSH GOVERNMENT

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

The statement is fundamentally flawed as each of the nearest schools or potential receiving schools have a lower educational attainment through ESTYN reports including lower attendance. The enforced closure will also affect the health and well being of all pupils, separating friendship groups and each child will have to form new relationships with Teachers, support staff and new class structures.

The consultation document identifies mixed age classes as a weakness in Llanfihangel Rhydithon School, however this is normal practice throughout the majority of the named potential receiving schools, even the larger ones such as Crossgates and Trefonnen.

New curriculum

It is stated in the consultation document that the alternative receiving schools such as Crossgates and the other schools are larger schools, therefore the expectation would be that there would be an improvement in the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum provided to pupils, and that the alternative schools would be better placed to develop provision which meets the requirements of the new curriculum.

It is as wrong to assume that a small school cannot meet the full range of requirements of the National Curriculum as it is to assume that a large school can. Llanfihangel is at the forefront in implementing the new curriculum and is more than equipped to deliver the requirements of the new curriculum in the future.

Additionally, the categorisation system gives a clear and fair picture a school is performing compared with other schools across Wales. It also helps to identify the schools that need the most help, support and guidance to improve.

The support category for the potential alternative receiving schools Crossgates, Knighton, Llanbister, Cefnlllys are all yellow and Llanfihangel is green.



COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND

The following is a Community Impact Assessment on the effect of the proposal to enforce closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School

Powys County Council has brought forward a proposal to enforce closure of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School in August 2022. This would have a detrimental effect to individuals, families, and the wider surrounding community. Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is the heart of the Community of Dolau and the surrounding area. It is a vibrant community with forward thinking, positive residents who support each other and have a strong community spirit.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is the last remaining rural school in East Radnorshire, to remove this educational facility, there would be a vast area of East Radnorshire with no options for educational opportunities.

This would result in a negative impact on the local economy and housing market. It is a recognised fact that a successful and vibrant school in the Community encourages young families into the area. Powys as a County has an aging population and young people leave the County for further Education and do not return.

However, the past pupils of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School had a solid inspired and most importantly enjoyable educational base to build on and have returned to the county and produce a high percentage of professional, economically productive, and socially responsible members of the Powys population, in comparison with other rural

areas where their school has been forced to close. The current and future pupils will also benefit from the proven overall ethos of the school.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school has past pupils working throughout Powys as Entrepreneurs running their own businesses and employing local people supporting the local circular economy. There are Civil Engineers, Solicitors, Architects, Police Officers, Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors working within the Public and Private sectors in the County. Past pupils volunteer in many varied roles across the County and some have also undertaken socially responsible roles within Powys's political structure at a Local and County level.

The pupil numbers have increased since 2016, when the Authority last tabled this proposal, and the projection is for the number to continue to rise over the next 5 years.

The school is actually slightly above capacity, however on the advice of Council Officers an area of the school was refurbished into a storage/administrative area. This can be returned to its original condition by the Friends of Dolau School with no cost to Powys County Council.



COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

ACTIVITIES & FACILITIES

Within the consultation document it is stated that there would be a 'positive impact on pupil wellbeing and attitudes to learning as they would transfer to larger schools with larger cohorts of pupils, providing improved social and extra-curricular opportunities'. It is clear that a wide range of extra-curricular activities are available to pupils at Llanfihangel Rhydithon C.P. School.

The school provides the following after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities

- Weekly Key Stage 2 club featuring ICT, Art, and Cooking
- Weekly Welsh club
- Weekly Sports club and football club
- Choir
- Weekly drop-in sessions for reading and development
- Clwb Cymraeg
- Eco Club
- School Council
- Criw Cymraeg
- Music lessons

Whilst some of these clubs are run by staff and governors, some are run by community volunteers / parents and outside organisations. One of the primary arguments for large schools is the extracurricular diversity, or variety of classes, they offer, however is a wider diversity required at Llanfihangel?

The school accommodates or provides the following other facilities or services:

- Daily Breakfast Club
- Dolau Ti a Fi Club held on the site.
- Cylch Meithrin which is held on the site and has good links with the Foundation Phase.
- Community Library Bus
- Young Sports Ambassador Scheme
- Youth Club relies on pupils from the school.



COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

LINKS BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

The school also provides a rural play space as the village has no communal play space other than the school.

The Community Hall is co-located on the same site as the School, the Community supported the school by fundraising and managing the build of the building to give the school much need indoor space for physical activity and lunch arrangements.

Dolau Recreation Association has 75 years of a 99-year lease remaining, giving the hall and its users access to the school grounds whilst an event is going on.

Other community activities that the school is involved in include:

- Local YFC use the school grounds and community hall.
- Community hall use the school grounds and car park.
- Youth Club use the school grounds.
- The community hall uses the school as a 'green room' for local shows and entertainment.
- The school's conservation area is used by all user groups and members of the community.
- The local WI and YFC hold meetings and the Youth Club, Cylch Meithrin and Ti a Fi use the grounds to learn about wildlife and the environment v)

Other links between the school and the community

- Harvest festival is held every September in the community hall. This involves the local vicar, members of the community and the pupils and staff of the school.
- Christmas Carols around the Christmas Tree is held every year in the school playground
- Dolau Christmas Fayre is held annually in the community hall. The pupils make items to sell at the event and pupils record songs and poems to sell.
- Annual Christmas Concert is held by the school in the community hall. It is a very popular and well attended event.
- Dolau Summer Fayre30
- Annual Sport Day which is held in a local farm field. This is well attended by the community, parents, and governors.
- The school participates in DRA events throughout the year e.g., games evenings quizzes, cinema - The school has close links to local businesses such as horse riding.
- Links with the local church magazine and with the local vicar who leads collective worship at the school.
- Liaisons with Dyfed Powys Police through the School Community Police Officer



COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

LINKS BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

- Liaisons with Mid & West Wales Fire Service through visits from local firefighters
- Links with the local Eisteddfod in Llandrindod Wells
- Friends of Dolau School which work tirelessly to raise funds for the school to support buying resources to enable a full 21st Century curriculum.
- Links with local concerts, singing, poetry, instrumental etc.
- Links with local History Group and arts projects
- Dolau YFC & Dolau Youth club rely heavily on Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School for the vast majority of their new members, the majority of who go on to take up senior roles in the club, Chairman, Vice-Chair, Secretary etc
- Llandrindod Junior Silver Band consists of 14 members, a majority of those band members have been taught in Dolau School. The band attend and support lots of local events held within Llandrindod, Rhayader and Builth Wells.

This is not an exhaustive list and local organisations have been asked to provide statements on the effect that the enforced closure would have on their activities. These statements are detailed at Appendix 2.



THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NEIGHBOURING SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to highlight the number of small schools which have been closed in Radnorshire in recent years, The Dolau School action group, with the help of children from Llanfihangel Rhydithon Primary School have created scarecrows as visual props to spread the plight of the school, far and wide. 'Have you seen the scarecrows across Powys?' was published in the Brecon and Radnor 12th May.

Small school closures on rural community's research found that closures not only create divisions between communities but lead to a reduction in parental and community involvement in school life. They diminish children's sense of community identity and result in a loss of community confidence and general decline in the quality of life.

We would think it only right and part of the Councils duty of care to those communities for research to have been carried out into the effect that their actions have had on communities and not least the effect that this has had on the pupils that are moved as a result of their policies and decision.

The following pages show the responses from the neighbouring communities of Beguildy, Nantmel and Llangunllo.



THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NEIGHBOURING SCHOOLS

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF BEGUILDY SCHOOL

The following is a statement from Beguildy Community Council

When the doors finally closed on Beguildy Church-in-Wales School on 31st December, 2013, it was the end of a vigorous campaign fought not just to save our school but to save our community. The official Community Impact Assessment (CIA) from the County Council (extracts quoted in table below) brushed aside arguments from Governors, Parents, Community councillors and the wider community that the closure of our rural school would mean that the community was losing not only its heart but its future.

Former pupils scattered to five different schools, some across the border into England, not to the one school designated by the LA. The equation had seemed simple to the officials looking for a neat solution on paper; we had a small school and six miles away was a larger school in a less rural setting with surplus places so why not simply transfer those children as a block. For so many parents, themselves educated in a small rural school, the choice was understandable and simple: they wished their own children to have that unique experience and consequently, the neat solution, envisioned by the accountants and bureaucrats, was side-lined and thus began the breakup of the community as we knew it.

Our close-knit community where youngsters went to school together, grew together and shared their social lives has now fragmented. New friendships have formed in different catchment areas, pupils moved through the primary schools to different secondary schools, with their new friends, in areas further afield and alien to the previous generations.



THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NEIGHBOURING SCHOOLS

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF BEGUILDY SCHOOL

Social links outside school drew these young people away from previously thriving organisations in the valley, such as YFC, as new alliances were formed, leading to the predicted decline in membership.

The loss of the school has left a hole in our community. Social isolation, especially amongst the elderly, has increased. The physical buildings provided opportunities for cross generational mixing which was beneficial to old and young alike. The Cosy Café set up within in the school allowed senior citizens to mingle with young people, reducing their loneliness, keeping them young at heart and enabling the next generation to learn tolerance and understanding of their older neighbours. Fund raising events were also social opportunities which encouraged people to get to know one another, as were the celebrations of national events. The school grounds, as the only publicly owned land in the upper valley and offering catering and toilet facilities, were invaluable for communal activities.

Seven years on, the rapid deterioration of the school buildings and grounds, untended, unloved, derelict and silent, is a painful daily reminder of what we have lost. The school and its children brought life into the village. Officials, whether in Cardiff Bay or County Hall, must realise that a community is not represented by maps or statistics but by inter-related lives. We wonder what future our community now has. There is plenty of land available for development but, knowing that their children will have to travel out of the community for their education and may have less access to the broader after-school activities which enhance educational opportunities,

why would any young family choose to come and live amongst us?

The following is a review of the community impact statement comments and the reality

Statement 1

'Communities can remain vital and viable places even when their school closes - less than half of the pupils come from the village of Beguildy so the immediate impact on Beguildy itself is reduced.'

The reality

Our concerns about the future viability of the community to attract people with children and of working age were dismissed but have proved to be all too true. The last phrase betrays a wilful ignorance of a rural community which, by definition, draws its members from the homes and farmsteads scattered around the core settlement.

Statement 2

'The closure of the school will mean the loss of a community facility and an impact on village life. There are however other community facilities such as the church, the shop and the pub. Subject to the views of the Church in Wales, the school building could still be retained for community use if the school was to close.'

The reality

Our once thriving church is now open for occasional services and has an increasingly elderly and dwindling congregation. As a Church in Wales school, there had been close links between the school and the church. Harvest Suppers were

held in the school hall which was conveniently located for the church. The children contributed to all major festivals and this, of course, brought the parents and grandparents, who might not otherwise have considered themselves to be church-goers, through the doors.

The village shop benefited greatly from customers dropping in as they dropped off or collected pupils from school and, in turn, the community benefited from the opportunity the shop provided as a meeting place. That now has been lost and trade has declined. When the current owners retire it may signal the end of the shop as a going concern. The Church was clear that it had to deal with any disposal of its assets held in trust in accordance with the Charities Act which meant obtaining the best price and consequently the building and land were advertised for public sale.

Statement 3

'The Parent and Toddler Group could continue in the building or locally if the school closed.'

The reality

The central location of the school as a base for the Parent and Toddler Group was a unifying feature in the valley. Retaining use of the building was not possible as our expression of interest was ignored and there is no suitable alternative building in the village. Now, those parents from the southern end of the valley choose to send their pre-school children to Knighton rather than journey further up the valley to Felindre, thereby weakening the links between the upper and lower valley.

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NEIGHBOURING SCHOOLS

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NANTMEL SCHOOL

The following is a statement from a parent of an ex-Nantmel pupil

When Nantmel School closed in 2016 my two sons had to transfer to another local school. They settled after some time but that was not without huge emotional upheaval and a great deal of stress on our whole family. One of my son's maths levels went down on their report as he already found school difficult whilst my other son maintained his levels but found the whole situation difficult to deal with becoming very quiet and on one occasion in tears of sadness at the closure of the place where he really thrived.

Nantmel was already without a pub, shop or post office and so the school was the only place in the community providing social opportunities across the generations. Once the school shut those social opportunities stopped because there was no one left to organise them. The community essentially had to split depending which school they chose to send their child. Grandparents and other extended family members supported school events both practically and financially.

There were more extracurricular activities than there are now because of the time people were willing to give to their community. There are now no social gatherings in Nantmel leaving some of our older generation socially isolated and less opportunities for those extracurricular activities that enhanced learning opportunities. The same is likely to happen at Dolau.



THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NEIGHBOURING SCHOOLS

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NANTMEL SCHOOL

A child-centred approach is key, but Nantmel School children said they wanted to stay at Nantmel, yet they were not listened to. Even though we are nearly 4 years on from Nantmel School closure my sons still both talk about the school and how they miss it. For the purposes of this I asked them why. One son said "there just weren't as many fights and arguments and the teachers always heard you. He explained further that since being in their new school he would have to ask the teacher for help more often because of the general noise level in the classroom so it has had a direct impact on his learning. When I asked my other son what he liked so much about Nantmel School he simply said, "Everybody knew one another, and everyone got on". It was village life, a strong community and a good school that we had, that we chose to be part of, which was creating happy, healthy, confident learners who had respect for each other and everyone around them. I can't understand why anyone would want to take that away.

Parent

The following is a statement from a Powys Teacher and parent of an ex-Nantmel pupil

I have read the proposal to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon School with great sadness. My daughter Rose attended the school and I am a Secondary School teacher in Wales. The proposed closure seems to rest on two key reasons; financial and the low level of SEN provision in small Powys primary schools.

Financially I can appreciate that stretched resources put

pressure on smaller, older schools with low pupil numbers. But it is such a short term solution to the situation, and once taken is frighteningly irreversible. Like small cottage hospitals in the area there are strong arguments for closure but the reality produces a wasteland of provision and fails to cater for the needs of this specific rural community. Small schools are unfashionable at the moment, finances mean everything and the long term success of pupils from these schools seems lost in a plethora of data that hides the simple fact that pupils thrive and do better with smaller classes and closer relationships with other year groups, as in small primaries.

What is not unfashionable at the moment is a realisation that child confidence is at the heart of all child future attainment. These small schools build confidence far better than larger hub primaries where children travel miles on public transport to larger classes and year group segregated teaching. It is my firm opinion that even the data will prove soon that these schools provide a far better service than is currently acknowledged, and there will be a drive back towards smaller, more local educational policies. But by that time it will be too late.

Nantmel School closed and I see the loss of community that has occurred as a result. The complex web of social interactions that a local school provides is incalculable and it is shameful that this is not being taken into account on any level while these decisions are being made.

Provision of SEN is deemed to be inadequate in these small

schools. I would question the entire premise of this. SEN provision is patchier throughout the Welsh education sector than anyone will admit, funding levels mean the wrong pupils are targeted while those in need get left without support. In a small school such as Llanfihangel Rhydithon the teacher:pupil ratio mitigates the need for as many SEN staff and means the teachers know the pupils' needs in far greater detail and crucially, have the time to help them, which in classes of 30+ simply does not happen. I have seen this at first hand.

Finally the truth is that children thrive in these small schools. Closing them purely on financial grounds is short-sighted and ignores the needs of communities in a way that seems breathtakingly arrogant. If Covid 19 has taught us anything, surely it is the need for more local, small scale connections and institutions, not fewer?

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF NEIGHBOURING SCHOOLS

THE EFFECTS OF THE CLOSURE OF LLANGUNLLO SCHOOL

The following is a statement from residents / past pupils of Llangunllo School.

Llangunllo Community Impact Assessment

following closure of the school in 1984 Llangunllo School was closed by Powys County Council in 1984. There were 9 pupils studying there at the time of closure. All pupils were settled and happy. There were 2 additional children set to join the school at the time of closure. The nine children that were moved all went in different directions to new schools.

The effect this had on the children

One child went onto Llanbister School and did not settle well. Everyone had their own little groups and she always felt left out. At Llangunllo School they had not yet studied times tables, in Llanbister they already had and did not cover them again. This is something that she has always struggled with. You may say that this was insignificant, but it wasn't for this child, who always felt as though she were on the fringe of things at Llanbister. This has had long term impacts for this child.

One child went to Whitton School following closure. This was not a happy time, she took a long time to settle in and did not cope with the change well. She has not coped with change well since and struggles to deal with change in her work and home life. She was bullied, did not make good new friends and struggled to fit in. Since then she has struggled to integrate into new groups, always wanting to sit on the outside, where it is safe. Children do not adjust quite as the experts say they do. We have evidence of this right here.

There was no effort made by the Local Authority to adjust us to the change, there was no settling in period. Children do not just ADAPT.

Economic impacts

3 job losses due to the closure of the school.

Although the council saved money initially by closing the school, the retirees who moved into the village and required home help and social care in the years following surely outweighed the costs of the school running, which were in actual fact only transferred to Whitton school and in transporting children to Whitton and Llanbister schools. Short term effects on the community of Llangunllo

The school used to hold events in the church next door, this ceased when the school closed. The events used to attract more people than to usual services and therefore more collection money and participation. Numbers attending church dwindled. Community events such as the summer and Christmas fetes had less attendance. But the older generation (our grandparents generation) did all that they could to keep things going.

Medium term effects on the community of Llangunllo (5-10 years after closure)

Participation at the events list above decreased. It wasn't that families moved away, but young married couples didn't look for property in the village, instead moving to Knighton, Presteigne or Llandrindod Wells where their work was. There was no school to encourage them to stay in the village. The

only families that did stay were those who were able to build of family ground or on farms. These young families sought social groups and events in other communities and had less community involvement in Llangunllo.

Available property was snapped up by retirees, who could afford to pay more than local people. Most of these had very little community involvement.

Long term effects on the community of Llangunllo (ten to twenty years after closure)

Our grand parents generation had passed away, they were the ones that kept the village event going as long as they could. The church summer and Christmas fetes ceased. The Llangunllo summer show stopped due to poor attendance.

The Evergreen and WI clubs dwindled in numbers. Church attendance was at an all-time low. The Youth club was still going, but only as the club attracted children from as far as Knighton, Whitton and Bleddfa.

During the summer of 2012 the Diocese of Brecon called a community meeting on the proposed closure of Llangunllo church as the church committee felt they could not keep going. The community did rally and it is still open, but only because of the hard work of a few. The church wanted to sell the church hall.

The Hall committee had to take on the lease or the community would have lost it forever. This is what would happen in Dolau should you close the school. It has happened in other places also as stated in various papers.

WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

DOLAU PARENT AND TODDLER GROUP

The following is a statement from Dolau Parent and Toddler Group

On behalf of Dolau Parent and Toddler, we feel there will be a great impact on our group of Llanfihangel Rhydithon school closes and we have outlined our concerns below for you, your colleagues and councillors to take into consideration when making the decisions on the future of the school

- Isolation and loneliness is a growing problem in rural areas and particularly after having a new baby or moving to a new area. The group offers friendship and peer support and a chance to socialise and play.
 - Feeling of isolation can leave you more susceptible to mental health problems like depression.
 - Public transport in our rural location is a problem, therefore a local group is very important.
 - Parents and grandparents bring their children to this group so they are familiar with the setting; they naturally step into Playgroup which is also run in the same Community Hall. It is a seamless transition from this group into Cylch Meithrin and onto the school.
 - We arrange trips and have group outings which leads to social inclusion and provides parents with support they may need at difficult times
- If Llanfihangel Rhydithon School closed this will impact on our group as people will not feel the same allegiance to the community, older children will attend other schools meaning it is difficult to collect older children at the end of the school day as our group runs 1.30-3.30 pm.
 - We are concerned for this groups future and the social and emotional benefits we provide for new and young mothers
 - As the parents of preschool children, we feel we should be offered the choice of where our children are educated and small school should be part of this choice.



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

CYLCH MEITHRIN DOLAU

The following is a statement from Cylch Meithrin Dolau

Cylch Meithrin Dolau provides seamless natural progression from Ti a Fi (Parent and Toddler Group 0-school age) to Cylch (pre-school), and then into the Reception class at Llanfihangel Rhydithon School

Due to high demand we have started a specific day just for 2 year olds to come to the setting, to gain independence, make friendships and begin learning through play in a structured setting. We have the capacity for 8 children and this is fully booked, with a waiting list.

Once the child turns 2 and half, and depending on if we have the capacity, they can attend Cylch Meithrin Dolau for 2 half days a week and can access the 3+ funding the term after they turn three. We currently have 8 children attending, 2 with 3+ Funded places.

5 of the 8 children currently attending our Cylch, have older siblings in Dolau School already, so if the school were to close, Cylch would lose those children to the receiving school / pre-school setting.

We have a great community support which has allowed us to set up this committee led provision, which has not been easy, but through it all we have provided a childcare service to the community.

We have been successful in gaining £10,000 grant from Powys County Council last year, for Cylch to make



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

CYLCH MEITHRIN DOLAU

alterations to the portacabin on site at Dolau school. This brought us out of our temporary location at the village hall. This has meant that we now have a fully established and CIW registered setting in Dolau, providing friendly childcare, and introducing the children to the Welsh language with 100% of families having no Welsh spoken at home.

Cylch Meithrin Dolau employ 2 members of staff to run the setting, adding more money to the local economy. What is the future for these ladies, should the setting close as a result of the school closure?

As soon as we were able to re-open after the initial COVID lockdowns, the children were so excited and desperate to return; and the parents happy to trust that their children were returning to a safe and nurturing bubble.

We operate the setting to coordinate with breakfast club at the school, this is working really well as parents/carers can do one drop off in the morning and carry on their day. We are mindful as a committee that parents are busy working, more than ever before, and we are trying to provide them with the tools to make life that bit easier.

Local residents and those from further away are supporting our Cylch Meithrin setting, by choosing to send their children, as we are a rural area. Although Crossgates School has a provision, they don't take children until they turn 3 years old, so there is a childcare gap. If you are unable to get to a nursery in town there were no other options for childcare. Parents are happy to pay for the sessions

compared to keeping them at home, as they can see benefits on the child's' personal development. It also may allow the parents/carers time to work child free and provides some adult interactions at the drop off and pick up times. When living rurally you may not see anyone else from day to day. Mental health and happiness, especially after a year of lock down, is not to be underestimated for our rural parents and carers, and the children who may lose out if this provision is affected by the closure of Dolau School.

The setting, although it's new, is flourishing and to see the waiting list in double numbers is a remarkable achievement. Looking at the babies in "Ti a Fi" only shows that the future is promising for our area. Dolau is a vibrant young community with lots of people willingly giving up their time to organise community events, and run community businesses like Cylch, and the village school really is the heart of it all. Without the school, young people will simply move to where school runs can be facilitated easier. At Dolau, children can participate in after school activities and are able to play with friends at school social events.

The closure of the school may not have an immediate effect on Cylch Meithrin Dolau, but I can guarantee with no footfall to school it will eventually be another nail in the community coffin.



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

DOLAU YOUTH CLUB

The following is a statement from Dolau Youth Club

We are a group of children aged between ten and fifteen, who belong to Dolau Youth Club. All of us live in the village or the surrounding community, and every one of us apart from a few exceptions has been educated at Dolau Primary School. Our Youth Club has been in existence for nearly twenty five years, soon after the Dolau Community Centre was built, part funded by the children, parents and the outlying community.

Meeting twice a month, we enjoy a whole range of activities and learn many new skills, such as cooking, first aid, gardening and orienteering. We also get lots of physical exercise which includes bike rides, walks and sports evenings in the summer. All within a safe and nurturing environment.

All the children get a say in how the club is run, organising our own programme of activities and events. During the past few years we have successfully applied for grants obtained through PAVO, which we have used to develop and expand our club. Amongst other activities we were fortunate to have a workshop which took place through the summer months where we were all able to take part in silver jewellery making. Others skills that we have enjoyed taking part in, a first aid course run by St John's ambulance.

We are all aware how very lucky we are to live in Dolau and to have a Youth Club right on our doorstep. Our parents are very supportive, through supervision of our sessions and

support in running the club and without the local and wider community all our fundraising efforts would be in vain. We need to know how the club is going to survive if you take our school away? There is no Youth Club at Crossgates with the nearest been Llandrindod Wells nearly ten miles away. Many children who attend Crossgates are from outside that community therefore they have no ties to the local area after school has finished, no child or parent feels part of the community. We do not have that problem in Dolau. The school at Llanfihangel Rhydithon is and always will be an integral part of the community, every child that has been educated at Dolau school has then moved into Youth Club and then onto other Youth organisations within the village. The closure of the school will have a devastating and irreversible impact on both our club and the village.



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

DOLAU YOUNG FARMERS CLUB

The following is a statement from Dolau YFC

We are a group of young people aged 10 to 28 years, who are members of Dolau Young Farmers Club. We all live in the village or surrounding areas, meeting on a weekly basis to develop a wide range of skills, including public speaking, team building, educational and life skills. We also compete regularly in county, Wales, and National competitions against other young people. Our Young Farmers club has been at the centre of the community for the past 71 years and is supported greatly by a wide variety of the local community. The majority of our 40 members are past Dolau School pupils.

The club is run by our members, who plan a wide range of activities, training, and trips. We have been greatly impacted by the Covid pandemic over the past 15 months as we have been unable to meet as a club, organise any training or hold any fundraising events. As we are still yet to meet in person, we are unsure of the impact the pandemic has had on our member's mental health and wellbeing.

Should the school close, this would have a greater impact on our club, with members naturally progressing through the school and onto their local young farmers group.

We are concerned that should the school close, younger children will attend school elsewhere, make friendships in those areas and then go to other young farmer's clubs available. Without a school in the village, young families are less likely to move to the area as there will be nothing in Dolau to draw them to the local community.

With no school in the community, those with children are likely to move out of the village, leaving fewer young people to become members. As homes become available in the area, they are more likely to be occupied by older people who will not be of an age to attend either. The school pupils regularly support the club by making crafts for our carnival float, being on our carnival float and supporting our events.

As a club, we regularly use the school's outside space for sports and community activities. Without a school there, there is a risk we will not have the outdoor space to use. We also use the school carpark for our members to park for meetings, which may not be available to us in the future.

In conclusion, we really implore you to reconsider the future of our school in Dolau as it really is a valuable part of our community and the future of our club.



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

DOLAU MIXTURES

The following is a statement from Dolau Mixture

The Dolau Mixture is a mixed choir with twenty-four members. The choir meets once a week in Dolau Community Hall within the curtilage of Llanfihangel Rhydithon CP School.

All members of the choir are very concerned at the County Council's proposals to close Llanfihangel Rhydithon School which sits at the heart of our small community.

The choir has held its weekly practice in the Community Hall since its construction in 1997 and pays a weekly hire charge for the Hall. Powys County Council promoted a very successful partnership between the community and school that enabled the multi-use community hall to share its accommodation with the school and satisfy the statutory requirements for hall accommodation for the school.

This partnership between the school and the community has enabled a very successful choir to hire excellent accommodation within the community at an affordable price.

The choir fears that if the school were to close there would be significant reduced use of the hall during the day – a time when community use demand is low. This reduced use and income will inevitably lead to significant demands for existing users to pay greatly increased hire fees – probably at a figure that would no longer be affordable and thereby leading to the disbandment of the choir.

The Choir considers that the County Council in its Consultation Document has failed to identify the social costs of closing a well-established and successful community school in a sparsely populated but socially active area. Closure would have a significant detrimental impact on the whole community and not just families with young children.



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

FRIENDS OF DOLAU SCHOOL

The following is a statement from Friend of Dolau School

Friends of Dolau School(FODS)are a fundraising committee for Llanfihangel Rhydithon (Dolau) school.

As a committee we work tirelessly to raise funds for the children to enjoy things not covered by the school budget. We have purchased several items and supported many trips, some examples of what we have purchased are: Interactive white boards, Ipads, laptops, playground equipment, Christmas trips, subsidise the swimming bus, educational trips, Christmas gifts, easter eggs and extra resources needed by the school.

The committee is made up of parents of the children in the school, we have raised a considerable amount of money over the years.

In 2017/18 - £13,949

In 2018/19 - £8005

In 2019/20 - £2352 (due to covid less money was able to be raised this year.)

The community in Dolau is fantastic and as a committee we are saddened and disappointed to hear of your closure plans, the community and committee work closely and always pull together to run events and provide for our children in Dolau school. Due to our fundraising efforts we have saved the school a considerable amount and ensured our children get all the items they need to assist the teachers in delivering first class education such as a laptop per child and interactive white boards.

FODS also maintain the grounds and eco garden at the school, which enhances the learning environment for the children. We provide support and refreshments at school events where needed, for example at sports day.

As mentioned before Dolau is a very close community and over the years FODS have provided many social events for the children and their families. This provides a sense of community ownership to them all, something which will be greatly missed should you go ahead with your proposal.

Due to covid restrictions we were unable to fundraise much throughout 2020 but we have held 3 fundraising events this year since lockdown restrictions were eased and raised a considerable amount of money, a testament to just how committed our committee and community are in raising funds for our children.



WRITTEN REPRESENTATIONS FROM LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

WEST RADNOR MINISTRY AREA

The following statement is from **Rev. Andrew Perrin**
Ministry Area Leader for the West Radnor Ministry Area.

I write to give my wholehearted support for Llanfihangel Rhydithon School in its aim to become a Church in Wales school.

Since my arrival as the priest of the parish, some seven years ago, in which the school resides, I have been impressed, moved and humbled by its place as a focal point for the community that it serves. To use the words of the Estyn report "The school is a happy, caring community in which pupils thrive as confident, capable learners. Their behaviour in and around the school is exemplary." I have had the honour to experience this first-hand through my leading of assemblies in the school, working with the children in a number of the parish churches and many of them attend the Sunday School at St. Tecla's Church, Llandegley.

Its place in the community brings people together as a family, and I do not say that lightly, many of the children's parents and grandparents attended the school and this really comes to the fore when community and school come together. I have been fortunate to witness the sharing of knowledge, joy and togetherness and this contributes greatly to a "happy, caring community" in which all thrive in every way.

I feel as a Church we have a duty to foster and maintain communities, my prayer, is that we can continue to do this by helping this school to maintain its place in the community it serves. I cannot stress enough the importance of this school to the children in their learning, development and awareness of community in every way.

The school motto "Developing Our Learning And Understanding" DOLAU

Let's not lose this opportunity to make a difference, to Learn, to Develop our Understanding of the significance of what this school dose for the children and the community, so I encourage to approve their application.



SUMMARY

This impact assessment was undertaken by the Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School Action Group on behalf of the Dolau community. It was conducted because the proposals presented by Powys County Council (PCC) lacked a full assessment of the potential impact of closing Llanfihangel Rhydithon C P School on the community of Dolau.

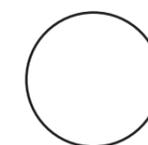
Having studied Powys County Council's proposal from 2016 and the proposal being put forward now at length, there is no new information or redefined need to continue with the proposal at this stage. Welsh Government have also used Llanfihangel Rhydithon School as an exemplar rural school, fully supported by Powys County Council.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon school has increased in pupil numbers and is projected to continue to do so. It was inspected by ESTYN in 2019 and was categorised as green in all elements of the inspection. All the schools listed by the local Authority as "the nearest alternative school" are consistently achieving lower ratings than our school, with poorer attendance and lower achievements.

The document has outlined the strong, well established links between the wider Dolau community and Llanfihangel Rhydithon School. This clearly promotes supports and reinforces much that is represented by the criteria set out in Welsh Government and Powys CC policies.



MAP OF LOCAL SCHOOLS (WITHOUT DOLAU)
A large area of East Radnorshire will become an educational wilderness.

 **5 mile radius from school**

SUMMARY

Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is a warm and welcoming environment where children thrive not only educationally but socially creating confident and well round pupils. They are receiving a high standard of education with the attendance rate being one of the highest in Powys. The past pupils of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School had a solid inspired and most importantly enjoyable educational base to build on. The Dolau School Action Group has produced a video outlining the success of past pupils to sit alongside this document.

We have shown robust evidence from the experience of other local school closures in Nantmel, Beguildy and Llangunllo that closures not only create division between communities but lead to a reduction in parental and community involvement in school life. They diminish children's sense of community identity and result in a loss of community confidence and general decline in the quality of life.

To conclude, following an analysis of the information collected above, it is abundantly clear that the closure and loss of Llanfihangel Rhydithon School would have an irreversible and detrimental effect on the social, environmental and economic well-being of the village of Dolau and surrounding area.

Llanfihangel Rhydithon School is a forward thinking proactive exemplar of a Powys School and its at the heart of the Dolau Community. Powys County Council proposals should exist to strengthen communities such as Dolau and not to diminish them.





We are Dolau, We are Proud

