

Future of Great Gidding Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

To: Children and Young People Committee

Meeting Date: 25 April 2023

From: Executive Director: Children's Services

Electoral division(s): Alconbury and Kimbolton, Sawtry and Stilton, Yaxley and Farcet

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: KD2023/054

Outcome: The Committee is asked:

- a) to determine the statutory proposal to close Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School on 31 August 2023.
- b) in the event of a decision to close the school, to consider the implications of providing the families of displaced children with assistance towards the cost of:
 - i. transport (where they do not have a statutory entitlement to it) and
 - ii. school uniform at their new school

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) approve the closure of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School on 31 August 2023.
- b) approve, for children displaced by the closure:
 - the provision of financial assistance in the form of home to school transport or a mileage allowance
 - the provision of a single per child payment to assist with the purchase of uniform for their new school

Voting arrangements: Co-opted members of the Committee are eligible to vote on this item.

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1. Background and reason for the closure proposal

- 1.1 On 8 March 2023 the Committee considered a report on the [outcome of a Stage 1 statutory consultation on the future of Great Gidding CE \(VC\) Primary School](#), including the possibility of closure. The decision to consult (taken by Committee on 17 January 2023) was taken following longstanding concerns regarding the future viability of the school, in particular:
- falling pupil numbers, which were forecast to be below 40 in September 2023,
 - increasing financial constraints, generated by the low numbers on roll, very likely to harm the school's future capacity to provide educational provision in a structure and format consummate with modern expectations
 - the associated impact upon educational outcomes for children
 - the decision by 7 other primary schools/multi academy trusts approached to explore the possibilities for academisation or federation, not to pursue collaboration because of their concerns about the future viability of the school.
- 1.2 The Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance '*Opening and closing maintained schools*' (January 2023) sets out the reasons for closing a maintained school. These include but are not limited to, where:
- *there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;*
 - *it is to be amalgamated with another school;*
 - *it has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and the Secretary of State has revoked the academy order;*
 - *it is no longer considered viable;*
 - *it is being replaced by a new school*
- 1.3 The school currently operates 3 classes. On 31 January 2023, there were 44 pupils on roll. Subsequently, 14 applied for, and 9 took up places elsewhere. In addition to this, 10 Year 6 children will leave the school at the end of the current academic year to transfer to secondary phase. Consequently, at the time of the 8 March Committee meeting there was expected to be a maximum of 20 pupils on roll in September 2023. This would have necessitated the move to a 2-class structure and the associated onerous demands upon a headteacher who would, by necessity, also need to teach full-time. Numbers have dropped further since then – see paragraphs 1.4 and 3.0.1 below. Officers and the Diocese of Ely have been clear that they could not support that structural solution and would have significant concerns about the impact on educational outcomes for all children.
- 1.4 Numbers on roll have continued to fall such that there are only expected to be a maximum of 17 pupils on roll at the start of the summer term in April 2023, of which 10 are Year (Yr) 6 pupils.

Class	Year group (Summer term 2022-23)							
	Rec	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	1	2	3					6
2				1	0			1
3						0	10	10
Total Roll	1	2	3	1	0	0	10	17
PAN:	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	98
Spaces	13	12	11	13	14	14	4	81

- 1.5 The Local Authority (LA) recognises that the consultation on the future of the school closure led some parents to seek to move their children from Great Gidding ahead of a decision being made via the DfE process. However, a steady downward trend was already established prior to 2022/23 as referenced in the previous committee reports (January and March 2023) and, with it, the increasing concern that due to the size and capacity of the school there are limitations to the educational provision which could be offered to pupils. Officers' conversations with parents also suggested a number would have sought alternative school places had the school moved to a 2-class structure. For these reasons, officers consider that Great Gidding CE VC Primary School is no longer viable.
- 1.6 Having taken account of the feedback received during the consultation and the evidence provided by officers, the Committee, on 8 March 2023, approved the publication of a statutory proposal for the closure of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School on 31 August 2023.

2. Statutory Proposal

- 2.1 In accordance with the Education & Inspections Act 2006, as amended by the Education Act 2011 and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, a statutory proposal was published on the Council's website on 13 March 2023. The full proposal can be found in **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 The following groups and organizations' have been consulted on the statutory proposal:
- The DfE
 - The governing body of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School
 - Parents and carers
 - Staff
 - Trade Unions
 - The Diocese of Ely
 - The Roman Catholic Diocese of East Anglia
 - Secretary of State for Education
 - The local MP
 - MPs for constituents who are impacted in the local area
 - Local Cambridgeshire County Councillors

- Local District Councillors
- Neighbouring local authorities
- Local Schools
- Local Academy Trusts
- Local Early Years settings
- Local SEND services

2.3 A notice was published in the Hunts Post on 15 March 2023 and was also displayed at the school and on the local Parish Council notice board giving the website address where the full proposal could be accessed as well as the following information:

- how copies of the proposal could be obtained
- that anybody could comment on, or object to the proposal
- the date the representation period ended
- the address to which comments and objects could be submitted

2.4 As part of the communications plan starting in January 2023, seven press releases have been issued, resulting in 19 articles in the local media, plus eight social media posts across the Council's four social media channels reminding people about the consultation and how to respond.

2.5 In addition, a 30-day staff consultation began on 20 March 2023 (ends 3 May) to ensure that all staff at the school are fully aware of the implications and to minimise, as much as possible, the impact on staff employed by the Council to work at the school, if the decision is made to close it.

2.6 The publication of the statutory proposal triggered a four-week period of representation when anybody could comment on or object to the proposal in writing. By the end of the representation period at midnight on 9 April 2023, 3 responses had been received. A few individuals, mainly current parents, also emailed or telephoned officers and Members separately with regard to implications for their specific circumstances. Great and Little Gidding Parish Council also made a request to be informed and involved with any potential future developments of the school site.

2.7 The main themes arising from representations to the statutory closure proposal were largely similar to those raised during the consultation period, namely:

- Accuracy of pupil forecasts
- Capacity in local schools
- Preference for small schools
- Preference for schools with a designated religious character
- Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)
- Impact on pupils' wellbeing

- Impact upon the local community
- Presumption against the closure of rural schools
- Travel / transport arrangements

2.8 In addition to the points above, respondents also referred to:

- National funding rates – *One response made reference to the national funding rate as one of the reasons for the school's closure. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is the highest funded school in the county, it is not the reason for its closure. Its reference was included within the previous committee report to make clear to both councillors and members of the public, that all resource available has already been invested into the school and even at this level the education outcomes were being impaired by the size of the school.*
- Costs associated with new uniform – *This has been addressed in Section 7 of this report.*

2.9 Copies of responses received can be found in **Appendices 2a and 2b.**

2.10 In addition to the issues raised above, the DfE Guidance sets out a number of factors which the decision maker, that is the CYP Committee, should take into account when determining proposals to discontinue (close) a school. These are set out below.

The decision maker should:

- *(a) be satisfied that there is sufficient capacity elsewhere in the local area to accommodate displaced pupils, and the likely supply and future demand for places in the medium and long term*
- *(b) take into account the overall quality of alternative places in the local area, balanced with the need to reduce excessive surplus capacity in the system*
- *(c) have regard for the local context in which the proposals are being made, taking into account the nature of the area, the age of the children involved and, where applicable, alternative options considered for reducing excess surplus capacity*
- *(d) Equal opportunity issues must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which requires them to have due regard to the need to:*
 - *eliminate discrimination;*
 - *advance equality of opportunity; and*
 - *foster good relations between people with a protected characteristic and those without that characteristic*
- *(e) consider whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times or increased travel costs for local authorities or families, as well as any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase.*
- *(f) adopt 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 a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area*
- *(g) consider the effect that this will have on the balance of denominational provision in the area, as well as taking account of the number of pupils currently on roll, the medium*

and long term need for places in the area, and whether standards at the school have been persistently low.

2.11 The issues and factors set out above are addressed in sections 3.0 to 3.6 below.

3. Displaced pupils

3.0.1 Since the first report, considered by the Committee on 17 January 2023, pupil numbers at Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School have dropped over the spring term from 44 on 31st January, as parents have taken the decision to move their children, to the current position of 10 Year 6 pupils and 7 other pupils on roll after Easter.

3.0.2 Children have moved to a range of different schools taking places at Abbots CE Ripton Primary, BrinGreaton CE Academy, Alconbury Primary, Ashbeach Primary, Elton CE Primary, Folksworth CE Primary, Holme CE Primary, Sawtry Infant, Sawtry Junior Academy and William de Yaxley CE Junior. Out of 30 applications, it has been possible to offer all but 3 children a place at their 1st preference school.

3.1 The capacity of local schools to accommodate pupils displaced from Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School

3.1.1 The LA has assessed the current capacity at the school and other schools in the surrounding area. Pupil numbers across the 11 schools listed below show a surplus of 180 places or 8.3%.

Table 1: Actual pupil numbers on roll (January 2023)

Name of school	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total (R-Y6)	Capacity	Deficit (-) / Surplus
Sawtry Infant School	60	63	61	60					184	180	-4
Sawtry Junior Academy	65				58	57	56	83	254	260	6
Folksworth CE Primary	15	13	8	11	17	17	12	16	94	105	11
Stilton CE Primary Academy	30	27	15	19	18	28	25	26	158	210	52
BrinGreation CE Primary	17	16	12	15	17	12	19	15	106	119	13
Holme CE Primary	17	23	18	15	16	15	15	15	117	119	2
Yaxley Infants School	60	52	41	38					131	180	49
William de Yaxley CE Junior School	64				53	56	60	58	227	256	29
Fourfields Primary School	60 (90 Yr3)	59	60	60	90	60	61	58	448	450	2
The Ashbeach Primary School	20	19	12	21	14	19	19	18	122	140	18
The Elton CE Primary School	20	16	19	21	20	22	20	20	138	140	2
Combined total on roll		288	246	260	303	286	287	309	1979		
Capacity (if operating to PAN)		299	299	299	348	308	308	308		2159	
Deficit (-) / Surplus		11	53	39	35	22	21	-1			180

Data Source: Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC) January 2023

3.1.2 As referenced above in section 1.4, there were expected to be no more than 7 pupils remaining on roll at Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School at the start of the summer term who would require alternative primary school places if the school closes. As shown in the table above, it would be possible to offer places to all these children in other local schools.

3.1.3 10 of these 11 schools are graded 'Good' by Ofsted and one as 'Requires Improvement' which may influence parental choice. Even if we discount the latter, there are sufficient places amongst the remaining 10 schools to accommodate displaced pupils, with a remaining surplus of 151 or 7.9%.

3.1.4 The Council's Business Intelligence Service produces two sets of forecasts. The first set focuses on children resident in the catchment area only and does not take into account patterns of parental preference. The second focuses on forecasting the number of pupils if previous patterns of parental preference were to continue. All forecast data shows a continuing decline in forecast pupil numbers within the catchment served by Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School.

3.1.5 Schools operate most efficiently and effectively when full or nearly full, especially in the context of small schools. To this end, the LA seeks to keep the number of surplus places (the number of places in schools that are unfilled) to a minimum. However, it is generally

accepted that not all unfilled places in a school are surplus places, but that a small margin of surplus capacity is often allowed to facilitate parental preference, to take account of the fact that schools with available places may not always be in the part of a planning area where the demand is, and to allow for a degree of error in the forecasts. A school is generally considered to be full when it has less than 5% of its places unfilled. This is in line with the National Audit Office report on Capital Funding for new school places published in 2013, where it states:

“It is considered that on average 5 per cent was the bare minimum needed for authorities to meet their statutory duty with operational flexibility, while enabling parents to have some choice of schools”.

- 3.1.6 In the longer term a new primary school is planned for Sawtry, with a proposed opening date of September 2024. A key developer planning application will be submitted in May 2023. This school would serve children arising from new developments in Sawtry and would also mitigate the impact of displaced pupils wanting to take up a place in a Sawtry school. The new school is proposed to open with 1 FE/210 places and increase to 2 FE/420 places in line with demand. This would increase the overall level of surplus capacity available within local schools. Furthermore, there are classrooms in both Sawtry Infant and Sawtry Junior Schools which will be brought into use in 2023/24. Officers recognise that some of the schools in the table above have grown in numbers as a result of children who have already moved from Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School. In particular, growth funding has already been agreed for Sawtry Infant School as the LA requires it to operate an additional class in September 2023.
- 3.1.7 In summary, officers are satisfied that there is sufficient capacity elsewhere in the local area to accommodate displaced pupils, and the future demand for places in the medium and long term.
- 3.1.8 Parents may express a preference for their child to attend any school, but if Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School closes, Sawtry Infant and Junior Schools, and in due course the new primary school in Sawtry, would, for the purposes of school place planning and entitlement to transport assistance, become the designated catchment schools for children living in the villages currently served by Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School. The respective admission authorities, namely the LA for Sawtry Infant Schools and Meridian Trust for Sawtry Junior and the new primary school, would formally consult on this and include the proposed revised catchment proposals in the next Annual Consultation on Admission Arrangements for determination in February 2024 and implementation in September 2025. In the meantime, children resident in the villages currently served by Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary would qualify for transport assistance to attend schools in Sawtry because they are the nearest schools and beyond the statutory walking distances.

3.2 Equality of Opportunity

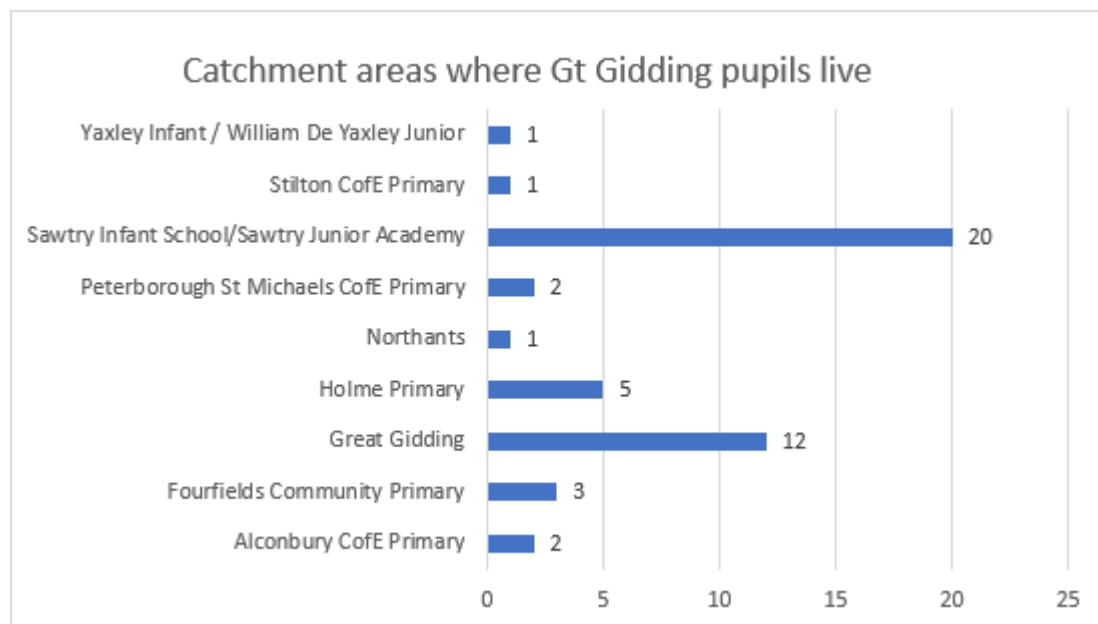
3.2.1 The Council, as decision maker, is required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty) in considering the proposal to close Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was carried out during the initial consultation period and was appended to the report which the Committee considered on 8 March 2023. The EqIA has been reviewed to take account of responses received during the representation period. An updated EqIA is provided at **Appendix 3**.

3.2.2 In summary, officers are confident that proper consideration has been given to the Equality Act implications of the proposed closure and that any detrimental issues can be successfully mitigated against as per the Equality Impact Assessment.

3.3 Impact on journey times, use of motor vehicles and transport costs for families and the local authority

3.3.1 Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School has always attracted parental preference applications from outside its designated catchment area (See Figure 1 below). The October 2022 Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC) recorded 47 pupils on roll. Only 12 (25%) of them resided in the Great Gidding catchment compared to 35 (75%) living in areas served by other schools.

Table 2: Catchment areas where Great Gidding Pupils Live



- 3.3.2 Of the 18 children living in the area served by Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School attending state funded schools in Cambridgeshire, 5 of them (28%) attended other state funded schools in the surrounding area.
- 3.3.3 From this information it is evident that the majority of pupils attending the school already face journeys to and from school each day. Given the large proportion of children who attend Great Gidding CE VC Primary School as a parental preference rather than a catchment placement, it is envisaged that displaced pupils would continue to be transported to and from school under arrangements made by their parents and carers and, given that the majority of pupils would be able to attend a school nearer to their home address, it is unlikely there would be a noticeable increase in car usage and that it might even be expected that car usage would reduce. Based on in-year applications received to date, many families have opted not to apply to their local school, as was the case when they expressed a preference to go to primary school in Great Gidding. As a result, car usage is likely to remain at a similar level.
- 3.3.4 For children living within the school's catchment area, it is acknowledged that closure of the school would result in a longer travel time. Parents may express a preference for their child to attend any school, but if the school closes, Sawtry Infant and Junior Schools would become the designated catchment school for children living in the villages currently served by Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School and children living in that area would be entitled to transport assistance to Sawtry as the nearest schools are located there and the distance is over the statutory walking distances. The journey time by minibus or taxi (depending on the number of children) to Sawtry would be approximately 30 minutes depending on the number of pick-up points.
- 3.3.5 It is acknowledged that some pupils living in villages currently in catchment for Great Gidding VCE (VC) Primary and attending the school might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day, but the proposal will not result in unreasonably long journey times. Journey times would all fall well within the DfE's best practice of 45 minutes maximum for primary age children as set out in its *Guidance on Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance* which states at paragraph 34: "*As a general guide, transport arrangements should not require a child to make several changes on public transport resulting in an unreasonably long journey time. Best practice suggests that the maximum each way length of journey for a child of primary school age to be 45 minutes and for secondary school age 75 minutes, but these should be regarded as the maximum. For children with SEN and/or disabilities, journeys may be more complex and a shorter journey time, although desirable, may not always be possible.*" [Department for Education](#).
- 3.3.6 In September 2023 the remaining 6 children living within the catchment area of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School roll will be comprised of 2 pupils in Year 6, 1 in Year 3 and 3 in Year 2. Estimated transport cost, based on current quotes, for them to attend primary provision in Sawtry (the nearest to Great Gidding and its feeder villages) is £134 daily/ £25,460 per annum. The journey time by minibus or taxi (depending on the number of

children) would be approximately 30 minutes depending on the number of pick-up points. This is well within timeframe of 45 minutes for primary age pupils. The transport route will be required for between one (for Yr 6 pupils) and four years (for current Yr 3 pupil) for displaced children. Table 2 above indicates that there are forecast to be 2 children in Reception in catchment in 2024 and 1 in each of the following years. The transport estimates include costs for transporting these children. As catchment children reduce in number it is envisaged that a smaller vehicle (taxi rather than minibus) will be required and this will be reflected in reduced costs.

3.3.7 In summary, some families who do not qualify for transport assistance under the Council's policy may be impacted by additional travel costs and travel time if they move their children from Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School to other parental preference placements. Car usage is likely to remain at a similar level. For in-catchment children, journeys will not be an unreasonable length.

3.4 Impact on the Local Community

3.4.1 The Community Impact Assessment (**Appendix 4**), undertaken as part of the initial consultation, identified a number of possible areas where the proposal could have some negative impact on a small number of local families and the local community, but also some mitigating factors which limit the impacts. These are set out in the table below.

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
Impact on pupils	Coping with change to a new school environment. This impact may be greater for children with SEND.	The local authority and schools would work to minimise disruption of transition. Additional transition support will be available for children with SEND.	Initially negative; later potentially positive in terms of widening peer groups and accessing different facilities. Overall: Neutral
Impact on parents and families	Loss of clubs and events.	All the alternative schools provide a range of clubs and events.	Neutral - Home to school transport is only provided at the start and end of the school day and not for wraparound care. This would be parental responsibility, in line with current policy.

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
Impact on wider community	Reduced bookings in community venue.	Great Gidding village hall hosts events not linked to the school and is likely to continue to do so. The impact of bookings for children is unlikely to be significant as the number of children residing in Great Gidding is unlikely to significantly change.	Potentially negative.
	Local shop losing trade	None	Potentially negative
	Reduced access to, and use of, the church for children, families. Reduction in the church community and the resulting impact on sustainability.	Community support will aid the Parochial Church Council in continuing to make the church available to the community, whether that be for festival times, regular worship for those who seek it, a spiritual safe-space, or general use for social benefit purposes.	Potentially negative
Access to a school with the same designated religious character	A number of pupils could be offered places at non-denominational schools.	There are other denominational schools in the area with places available (see section 5 above). Parents can express preference for a denominational school.	Neutral
Impact on neighbouring schools	Neighbouring schools would offer places to pupils currently at Great Gidding.	Work will take place to increase capacity and ensure sufficient places at surrounding schools to take all the pupils from Great Gidding.	Neutral or potentially positive due to the increased numbers on roll and associated increased per pupil funding, which would improve viability.

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
Impact on pupil travel arrangements	Some families may experience increased costs and travel time to school; others may experience reduced costs and travel time to school.	For the majority of pupils there are alternative schools nearer to their home address. Some pupils living in the Great Gidding catchment might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day. However for many their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance. Free home to school transport would be available for eligible pupils in line with the Council's statutory duties and its published policy.	<p>Potentially negative for pupils living in the Great Gidding catchment who might face longer journeys to and from school each day.</p> <p>Approximate minimum travel times each way, to and from school in Sawtry are below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Great Gidding, 10 mins ○ Lt Gidding, 9 mins ○ Steeple Gidding, 9 mins ○ Winwick 12 mins ○ Hamerton 10 mins ○ All villages 21 mins <p>The journey time by minibus or taxi (depending on the number of children) could be approximately 30 minutes if there were pick-up points in all the feeder villages.</p>

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
Impact on community demographics	Closure of the school may impact the balance of community.	The birth rate in the village is low and projected to remain so. Very few pupils arising are from new housing. The majority of new homes are likely to be in school admissions areas served by other schools. Assessment of settlements similar to Great Gidding indicates population stability regardless of there being a school.	Neutral

3.4.2 In any small community, the loss of one institution or business will be felt proportionately more than in a larger community and the closure of a school in a village community will undoubtedly impact. Good schools engage parents in their children's education and reach out to the wider community for support, as well as providing community facilities. However, these must be considered beneficial side-effects to the main duty of a school which is to provide a quality education to its pupils. Numbers on roll, budget deficits and quality of education must be the considerations in any decision on the future of a school and, while a community may be impacted by a decision to close, this cannot be the overriding determining factor.

3.4.3 The DfE Guidance refers to the fact that some schools may be a focal point for family and community activity providing extended services for a range of users, and their closure may have wider social consequences. The DfE Guidance states: *Where the school is providing access to extended services, provision should be made for the pupils and their families to access similar services through their new schools or other means.* There is no Early Years provision on the school site or elsewhere in the village. The school used to provide wrap-around care before school, after school or during the holidays. It ceased providing this in autumn 2022 when the lack of interest made it unviable. A dance club and a PE club are offered after school one day per week for approximately 1 hour and if the school closes these will cease. However, schools in the local area have a greater offer. The Community Impact Assessment covers this in detail. The LA would not provide transport assistance to enable children to attend wrap-around provision at their new school in the event of the closure of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School.

3.5 Presumption Against the Closure of Rural Schools

3.5.1 Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School is designated as a rural school under the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order 2022. Officers carefully considered the factors set out in section 15(4) of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 during the initial consultation and reported the outcome to the Committee on 8 March 2023. The report published in response to the Presumption Against the Closure of Rural Schools can be found in **Appendix 5**.

3.5.2 With numbers on roll in April 2023 at 17, the case for the closure of Great Gidding continues to be strong and in the best interests of local educational provision and the benefit of children.

3.6 Balance of denominational provision

3.6.1 Great Gidding CE Primary is a Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) school. The school has strong links with St Michael's church, into the grounds of which it has direct access from the school site.

3.6.2 Huntingdonshire, the district of Cambridgeshire in which Great Gidding Primary school is located, is well provided for in terms Church of England primary schools. Currently there are 19 Church of England primary schools providing a total of 3,747 denominational places in Huntingdonshire.

3.6.3 In the event of closure the number of denominational primary schools would reduce to 18 and the total number of places to 3,649. In summary, the impact of closure on the balance of denominational provision would be minimal. The chart below lists the other Church of England primary schools closest to Great Gidding. 3 of them are within 6 miles of Great Gidding via nearest road route.

Table 3: Distance to Denominational Primary Schools

Denominational Primary Schools in the area	Distance from Great Gidding CE VC Primary School in miles (Google Maps)	Published Admission Number (PAN)
BrinGreation CE VC Primary	6.2	17
Elton CE VA Primary	9.3	20
Folksworth CE VC P	6	15
Holme CE Primary Academy	5.7	17
Stilton CE Primary Academy	5.8	30
William de Yaxley CE Junior Academy	9.3	64

4. Quality of Education

- 4.1 The local authority has provided a high level of engagement with, and range of support to, the school in recent years for teaching and learning and leadership and management. This has ranged from between 10 to 19 visits per year between 2015 and 2018 from the School Improvement Service (SIS) and 8 visits annually since 2018/19, all well in excess of the usual entitlement of 5 visits annually from the SIS. These numbers do not include visits from other services such as the Early Years' Service and the SEND Service.
- 4.2 In September 2015, Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School was rated by Ofsted as Requires Improvement (RI). In October 2017, the school received an overall rating of Good, although the Outcomes for Pupils remained as RI. The school was inspected again in November 2022. This was a section 8 ungraded inspection by Ofsted. The outcome of the inspection was that: *There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.* The school can expect to receive its next section 5 graded inspection within 12 to 24 months of November 2022.
- 4.3 The key findings of the November 2022 inspection were that:
- *Leaders and teachers have worked together to bring about improvements to the curriculum. They have made sure that it is better suited to the mixed-aged classes in the school. The curriculum is designed to complement leaders' vision of 'growing great learners'.*
 - *In too many subjects, teachers do not ensure that pupils practice key knowledge until they are fluent. This means that those pupils who most need to be secure in crucial component knowledge struggle unnecessarily to complete complex tasks. Leaders should ensure that teachers thoroughly teach the most important knowledge and concepts that pupils need before they move on to new content.*
 - *Leaders do not consistently provide teachers with up-to-date information about pupils with SEND to inform their teaching choices. This means that teaching to support these pupils is not as precise as it should be. Leaders should ensure that teachers have, and use, detailed information about pupils with SEND to adapt their teaching appropriately.*
- 4.4 The report considered by the Committee on 8 March explained in detail the challenges and risks of operating a school with fewer children on roll such that school improvement advisers are of the opinion that the school would find it hard to retain its current Good grading when Ofsted returns to undertake a full section 5 inspection.

5. Alternatives to closure

- 5.1 As referenced in section 1.1 above and in more detail in the report to [Committee of 8 March 2023](#), a number of alternative options were considered by the local authority before the Committee agreed to consult on the proposed closure of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School. Attempts to identify primary schools willing to federate with the school were unsuccessful. In each case, following due diligence, the potential partnership school decided not to progress given the concerns around the viability of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School. The option for the school to academise with a Church of England Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) was also unsuccessful due to reciprocal concerns as to whether such an arrangement could provide for medium to long term sustainability. The school governors withdrew from the process. A discussion with a non-church MAT also confirmed that the low pupil numbers would pose too great a financial risk for the trust to consider the school joining it.
- 5.2 Neither federation or academisation would address the low pupil numbers and related budgetary challenges the school faces.
- 5.3 Officers have considered very closely the option of dropping from a 3-class to a 2-class structure. The report considered by the Committee on 8 March 2023 covered in detail the challenges posed by a 2-class structure which are enormous in terms of the responsibilities which would fall to just two teachers with regard to leadership (including curriculum leadership), safeguarding, training and development, health and safety, finance/ budgeting, the role of SENDCo in addition to full time teaching responsibility. It would risk jeopardising the pupils' entitlement to a broad curriculum offer and risk poor educational outcomes, particularly for pupils at KS2:
- a single class across all four KS2 year groups would require a bespoke curriculum for the school and potentially for the individual children
 - the teacher (who may be the headteacher) would have to have extensive knowledge of the KS1, KS2 and year 7 curriculum.
 - planning would need to take account of the sequence and progression of learning across three curriculum frameworks.
 - the developmental needs, physical and emotional maturity and level of independence of the pupils across this age range vastly differ.
 - the 2014 curriculum and the expectations around progressive sequence of key knowledge makes four year groups in a class much more challenging than in 2011.
- 5.4 If the Committee takes the decision not to close Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School on 31 August 2023, the school would remain open in September 2023 with a 1-class structure, with all 7 children (maximum likely number on roll) being taught in one class and a budget of £328,489. This may appear generous compared to £365,832 for the academic year 2022/23, given the low pupil numbers there would be. That is because the academic year and the financial year do not align. Consequently, 7/12ths of the academic year 2023/24 funding is based on the 2022 pupil census (when pupils numbers were in the 40s) and 5/12ths of it will be based on the 2023 census. From 2024/25 the budget would drop to

£226,611. Whilst there is a budget difference of £37,000 between 2022/3 and 2023/4 the difference in pupil experience in a two or one-class structure (as evidenced in the formal closure proposal at Appendix 4 and in sections 4 and 5.3 and 5.4 above) would be vastly different and more limiting and limited than in the current 3-class structure. There would be some staff redundancy. In summary, it would not be possible to provide quality education to such a reduced school population and their needs would be better served within the existing primary school capacity in the local area.

- 5.5 Officers and the Diocese of Ely were clear in March 2023 that they would not support a 2-class structure and would have significant concerns about the impact on educational outcomes for all children. Those conclusions were arrived at when the September 2023 pupil numbers might have been as high as 20 on roll. Now, the numbers on roll at the start of the summer term are 17 maximum of which 10 are Yr 6 pupils who will transfer to secondary phase in September 2023. Consequently, whilst it would be technically possible to afford a 2-class structure in September 2023, this would not be sustainable beyond the academic year, nor would it deliver the breadth of educational provision children are entitled to.
- 5.6 If the school were to remain open in September 2023, officers would come back to the Committee in October 2023 to request that it approve re-starting the statutory closure process. If that was approved, officers would ask the Committee to decide in late January 2024 to publish a closure proposal notice and Committee would determine closure in March 2024 to take effect on 31 August 2024. In addition, there would need to be a fresh consultation undertaken with school staff and it is highly possible that staff retention may be an issue.

6. Summary

- 6.1 The low level of pupil numbers, alongside the future educational offering and budget available have required officers to follow a statutory process to consider and ultimately recommend the closure of Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School. A thorough consultation has been undertaken with all parties from staff, pupils, parents and the wider community. The statutory process which requires officers to assess the viability of the school against a range of factors set out in this report makes the compelling decision to recommend closure unavoidable. Notwithstanding the impact on the children attending the school and the community it serves, there will also be some benefits, for example:
- the additional Key Stage 1 provision opening at Sawtry infants will have reduced class sizes meaning a more favourable pupil:teacher ratio for those Yr 1 and Yr 2 pupils
 - increased numbers on roll at Folksworth CE (VC) Primary will make that school more viable
 - the range of wrap-around, holiday and extra-curricular experiences and opportunities available at the local primary schools compared to those which Great Gidding CE (VC) has been able to offer pupils

- 6.2 In reaching the recommendation to close the school, the local authority has followed the statutory process set out in part 4 of the DfE Guidance, in accordance with Section 15 of the EIA 2006, as updated by the Education Act 2011 and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.
- 6.3 If the Committee decides to close the Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School, officers will contact the parents/ carers of all those still on roll to explain next steps with regard to applying for and securing a new school place for their child(ren) for September 2023 and to clarify what transport assistance they can expect.

7. Proposal to support the transport and uniform costs of displaced pupils

- 7.1 In section 8.4 of the report the Committee considered on 8 March, officers indicated that if the Committee decided subsequently to move to Stage 4 of the statutory process and close Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School, officers would propose that the Committee considers an exceptional case for the parents/ carers of pupils who were on roll at the school on 10 January 2023 and subsequently displaced to other schools, to receive support with associated transport and uniform costs. This will not include assistance for younger siblings who might subsequently have attended the school had it still been open.

7.2 Assistance with transport costs

- 7.2.1 Section 3 of the Council's Transport Assistance policy states: "*The Council reserves the right to make exceptions to the policy in circumstances where the Executive Director of Children, Families and Adult Services (CFA) considers it reasonable to do so and where it would be in the best interests of the child or young person concerned. Such exceptions are normally limited to those children/students attending their designated school*". Officers have taken legal advice which concluded that "*this would provide the basis for the LA to be more generous than provided for under the transport policy where it was in the best interests of the children concerned*" and that "*there is a strong argument for this to happen here given that it is a LA decision to close the school*". In addition, the approach in the statutory guidance on closures is about arrangements for displaced pupils overall. There is no distinction made in Section 3 of the Transport Assistance Policy between catchment and non-catchment pupils. The discretion in the policy would allow Members to make the same arrangements for all displaced pupils, or to differentiate the offer for catchment and non-catchment children.
- 7.2.2 In light of the above, officers are seeking the approval of the Committee to offer transport assistance to the parents of all children who were on roll at Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School on 10 January 2023 (it will not apply to any child who left the school before that date) and have subsequently moved their child(ren) to a different school, where the child's

new school is more than 2 miles walking distance or, if less than 2 miles, there is no available walking route to the school. It is proposed this will operate as follows:

- a place on a Council contracted route where the child will attend their catchment or nearest available school. This may be an existing route and may combine primary and secondary age children in the same vehicle. Safety of all children would be assessed and managed as required.
- for all other children a mileage allowance of 45 pence per mile for two return journeys per day **or** a place on a Council contracted route where such a route exists, whichever is the most cost efficient for the Council to a school of their parents' preference.
- where parental mileage is paid, it will be capped at 10 miles each way/40 miles total per day.
- effective from 2 May 2023 following the child's registration at that school
- transport will be provided until the child completes the primary phase at the end of Yr 6 **or** until the child moves to a school other than that attended immediately after leaving Great Gidding.

7.2.3 The forecast cost of applying the above exceptional transport assistance based on the placements of the children who have already moved from Great Gidding CE (VC) Primary School would be £65,132 per annum for the duration of the 2023/24 academic year. This is £44,232 more than the current spend per annum for transporting children to Great Gidding. The cost will decrease year on year due to reduction in the number of children for whom it is required. The cost for the 3 x Year Reception to Year 5 children who have not indicated a preference for an alternative school is not yet known. The cost may also be subject to change depending on a number of factors including changing transport costs and whether first preference schools can be offered.

7.2.4 This remains a discretionary decision of the Committee and if the Council provided its statutory requirements around transport, the cost would be significantly less for those children to access their nearest school place or for those displaced in the Great Gidding catchment.

7.3 Assistance with uniform costs

7.3.1 Given that the statutory guidance on school closures refers to displaced children as a whole, officers seek the approval of the Committee to make a single payment to parents/ carers of all children displaced from Great Gidding CE (VC) as a contribution towards the cost of purchasing uniform for the school to which the parent has moved their child(ren).

7.3.2 Officers request that the Committee agrees a one-off payment for each child displaced from Great Gidding who resides in Cambridgeshire, is in Yr R to Yr5, and was on roll at Great Gidding on 10 January 2023.

7.3.3 The costs have been calculated on the basis of:

- generic items available from a major supermarket chain where they are deemed acceptable by the school and specific school uniform suppliers where items are specified.
- 3x each item of everyday wear (or 4x items where generic items are sold in 2-packs),
- 2x shorts/summer dress,
- 2x tie (where needed)
- 1x each PE item (or 2 if they only come in 2-packs).
- All prices for age 10-11. Smaller sizes may be cheaper.
- PE bag/book bag only specified where a particular colour / logo is required.

Table 4: Cost of school uniform as at March 2023

School	Cost of boys uniform	Cost of girls uniform
Folksworth CE Primary School	£140.54	£147.09
Sawtry Junior Academy	£146.30	£150.30
Sawtry Community Infant School	£96.50	£98.50
Abbots Ripton CE Primary School	£108.25	£112.25
BrinGreaton CE Primary School	£108.00	£110.00
Holme CE Primary School	£175.75	£182.90
William de Yaxley CE Junior School	£107.05	£115.85
Ashbeach Primary School	£96.50	£98.50
The Elton CE Primary School	£96.50	£98.50

7.3.3 The total cost is not yet known as the destination school of all eligible children is not yet known. However, if we use information about the destination school where it is available, and an average cost where it is not, the approximate cost would be £3,909.82. The funding for these costs will be met from the closing balance of the school.

7.4 If these proposals outlined in 7.2 and 7.3 are agreed, officers will write to parents in May to outline the process for accessing this support.

8. Alignment with corporate priorities

8.1 Environment and Sustainability

The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- Given the geographical location of the school there is no opportunity for the use of public transport services for pupils living in the communities served by Great Gidding Primary School who would be displaced to other schools

8.2 Health and Care

There are no significant implications for this priority.

8.3 Places and Communities

The village of Great Gidding has a number of other focal points apart from the school, including the church and a modern village hall where community activities and events take place.

8.4 Children and Young People

This corporate priority is explicit throughout the report as it relates to school provision for primary-age children. The key themes and considerations are set out in sections 3 – 5.

8.5 Transport

The report sets out the implications for this priority in section 7.2.

9. Significant Implications

9.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- The current national funding formula (NFF) only allows funding to be allocated via factors defined within the NFF. As a result, there is no flexibility to subsidise smaller schools other than by the application of the sparsity factor which supports small schools in remote areas. Despite Great Gidding being the highest funded school in Cambridgeshire (either maintained or academy) and qualifying for this factor the maximum allowable allocation is not sufficient to support long term sustainability.
- There will be financial costs to closing the school, in particular in relation to staff redundancy costs and the decommissioning of the buildings and the site. Initial estimates of these costs are £18k for redundancy and between £100k and £150k for decommissioning the buildings and site, including the removal of mobile accommodation
- If the school closes the level of unspent Dedicated Schools Grant, as at the 31st August, would be calculated and used to fund assistance with uniform costs for displaced children, costs associated with closure and decommissioning of the site and growth funding for schools opening additional classes required by the LA to take displaced children.
- There will also be financial implications for transporting pupils displaced by the closure. These are set out in section 7.2 of the report. These transport costs will be an additional pressure on the home to school transport budget.
- The school is in contract with the Council's energy project contractor Bouygues

Energies & Services for delivery of the works to install an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP). The ASHP was delivered to the school site in March 2022 and is in situ awaiting pipework and electrical connections. Bouygues have invoiced the school £63,579 for the equipment and works delivered so far and the full grant of £42,596 has been claimed. The project has been delayed since then due to complexities in upgrading the site's electrical supply for the ASHP. These complexities have now been resolved but no further work is to be progressed until a final decision has been made by CYP Committee on the future of the school. In the event of a decision to close the school, the external funding partner is content for the project to be completed and the building handed back to the landlord with a decarbonised heating system. However, if the CYP Committee decides to proceed to Stage 4 and close the school, the Council's Climate Change & Energy Services team together with property services will review the scheme to determine the best option in relation to the ASHP.

9.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

9.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

9.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and shared with an EDI Super User (CCC499470646). A copy of this can be found at Appendix 3.

The report sets out details of significant implications identified by officers in section 3.2 above.

9.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are no significant implications. Full consultation and engagement with the stakeholders including parents/carers of pupils at the school and the local community have been undertaken before and at every stage during the statutory process.

9.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Officers engaged with and briefed the Local Member at every stage of the statutory process and also shared relevant information with the Members of the wards where displaced pupils have already been, or will be, offered new school places. The Local MP has also been informed of the content of the report ahead of the Committee.

9.7 Public Health Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

9.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

The overall balance of implications is neutral and the completion of the following paragraphs in this section has been undertaken in discussion with, and the approval of, the Council's Climate Crisis Strategy Manager.

9.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Neutral Status:

9.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Neutral Status:

Explanation: except for the very small number of children who live in the village of Great Gidding and can walk to school and who will be displaced and need to travel to a new school, those living in the other catchment feeder villages already travel to the school. Secondly, of the 30+ out-of-catchment children who have been traveling to Great Gidding 6 have applied to attend the school in their home catchment. 4 of them will no longer need transport. These children live in either Holme, Fourfields or Sawtry catchment. A further 15 have expressed a preference to attend a school which is not their catchment, as many did when they enrolled at Great Gidding CE VC Primary School.

Of the out of catchment children attending Great Gidding, 14 will have a shorter journey to school each day and 1 will have a journey the same length. Only 6 will travel a greater distance to school and in all cases, this is due to parental preference for a school outside of their catchment.

The cumulative distance travelled to school each day will increase by 33.8 miles for all children, by 43.4 miles for Great Gidding catchment children. It will decrease by 24.8 miles for out of catchment children. The average distance travelled to school will increase by 1.1 miles for all children, by 4.8 miles for Great Gidding catchment children. It will decrease by 1.2 miles for out of catchment children.

9.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Neutral Status:

9.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Neutral Status:

9.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Neutral Status:

9.8.6 Implication 2: Air Pollution

Neutral Status

Explanation is as implication 2 above (para 9.8.2)

Positive/neutral/negative Status:

Explanation:

9.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Neutral Status:

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?

Yes

Name of Officer: Josette Kennington

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Yes

Name of Officer Simon Cobby

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?

Yes

Name of Officer: Raj Lakshman

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?

Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

10. Source documents

10.1 [Children and Young People Committee Report \(17 January 2023\)](#)

10.2 [Children and Young People Committee Report \(8 March 2023\)](#)

- 10.3 [Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers](#)
- 10.4 [Pre-16 school transport](#)
- 10.5 [Home to school travel assistance policy](#)