

Appendix 5: Gt Gidding Church of England (CE) Voluntary Controlled (VC) Primary School Presumption against the closure of rural schools

Introduction

Gt Gidding Church of England (CE) Voluntary Controlled (VC) Primary School (Gt Gidding/the school) is designated as a rural school under the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order 2022.

The Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance *‘Opening and closing maintained schools’* January 2023 (the guidance) refers to a presumption against the closure of rural schools. The guidance states:

“Proposers should be aware that the Department expects all decision makers to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This doesn’t mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area”

The Local Authority (LA) therefore has a duty to carefully consider the factors set out in the guidance when proposing to close a rural school. These factors include:

- Alternatives to closure including: federation with another local school; conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust; the scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities e.g. child care facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc;
- Transport implications i.e. the availability, and likely cost of transport to other schools and sustainability issues; and whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times
- The proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community, i.e. whether the school is being used by the local community
- The size of the school and whether it puts the children at an educational disadvantage e.g. in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available;
- Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools
- The overall and long-term impact on local people and the community of the closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility; and
- Wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils.
- Whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local areas which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term)

Each of these factors is addressed below.

Context: Demographics of Gt Gidding compared to other small settlements in Cambridgeshire

The Council's Business Intelligence Service have carried out case studies of Cambridgeshire small settlements with similarities to Gt Gidding including Abbots Ripton, Chippenham, Coveney, Catworth, Sibson-cum-Stibbington, Little Wilbraham, Wimpole and Dry Drayton. The findings are summarised below.

- In 2020, all of these settlements had populations of less than 500, except for Dry Drayton, which had approximately 700.
- Gt Gidding is one of the smallest settlements considered with 322 residents in 2020.
- When considering the population data over time for each of these settlements (from 2011 to 2020), they remain stable with only minor variation. This may be because small settlements tend to be designated as "infill villages" in Local Plans meaning that only small housing developments of 1 or 2 dwellings are generally permitted.
- Of the 11 villages in Cambridgeshire with population between 300 and 350 in 2020, only Gt Gidding (pop 322) and Abbots Ripton (pop 310) have a primary school. Dry Drayton (pop 700) is the next smallest village with a primary school.
- In 2020, Great Gidding had the second smallest Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC) count of residents in the 4-15 age range of 27.
- By comparison Dry Drayton had a 2020 PLASC count of 101 residents in the 4-15 age range.
- In terms of total catchment population Gt Gidding has 560, Abbots Ripton 990, and Dry Drayton 700.
- Gt Gidding is comparatively isolated whereas Abbots Ripton is close to major roads and market towns
- The October 2022 pupil census records the 4-11 age population in Gt Gidding catchment as 19, Abbots Ripton 44 and Dry Drayton 66
- Gt Gidding and Abbotts Ripton are the smallest settlements in Cambridgeshire with a primary school.

Alternatives to closure

A number of alternative options (set out below and included in the consultation document) were considered by the LA and the Diocese of Ely before agreeing to consult on the possible closure of Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School. Officers approached 7 primary schools to explore possibilities for collaboration to support the school. Unfortunately, these approaches did not come to anything.

- **Federation.**

Only maintained schools can federate with each other. A maintained school is a community, voluntary aided or voluntary controlled school. Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School is a voluntary controlled school. A maintained school cannot federate with an academy.

Although federations are recognised as a way of enabling smaller schools to work more formally in partnerships to share costs, this would not necessarily address the financial challenges faced at Gt Gidding. Nevertheless, federation with another local church school has been explored and 3 schools have been approached. This is a voluntary decision for individual governing bodies to take and there is no obligation on those governing bodies to establish or join a federation. In each case, following initial due diligence, the potential partnership school decided not to progress given concerns around the viability of Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School. In summary, this option was not considered reasonable to take

forward given a lack of interest from other schools to partner with Gt Gidding Primary in this way.

- **Academisation.**

In undertaking their due diligence, academy trusts, both local and national, find some small schools to be financially unviable or too isolated to be included in their trust, unless they convert with other small schools as a local hub. Previous consideration has been given to the academisation of Gt Gidding and adoption into a church Multi Academy Trust (MAT). As a voluntary controlled school, it could only academise with a church MAT unless approval to join a non-Diocesan MAT was granted by the Diocese of Ely. This option was not considered viable by the Diocese and Council given a lack of interest from an appropriate church of England MAT. Academisation would not address the low pupil numbers and budget challenges the school faces.

- **Closure aligned with the planned new Sawtry Primary School**

The new school in Sawtry will open with Reception children only with a proposed opening date of September 2024. Pupil numbers will be managed to support the existing two schools in Sawtry. The 2023-24 academic year will require significant reduction in the education offer at Great Gidding due to funding. There will also be a challenge to recruit an interim Headteacher. The Council and the Diocese do not, therefore, see this option as viable.

- **No change**

As outlined in this consultation document, Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School has been undersubscribed in each of the last five years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of its published admission number (PAN) each year. There is very little in-catchment demand for places at the school. The school faces significant financial challenges, with the governors' five-year budget plan showing a deficit of over £40,000 by 2024/25. Doing nothing will not address these challenges.

A number of alternative options to closure were suggested by respondents to the consultation to address the challenges the school faces. These are set out below and have been categorised according to the following headings.

Those considered unrealistic, costly or outside the control of the local authority or school

- Increase the funding for the school either from local authority resources or by lobbying government, and work with the school to help improve it.

LA response: *The national funding formula is determined by the government and allocated to local authorities via the Dedicated Schools Grant. The local authority does not have the power or resources to increase funding for the school. Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School is already receiving the highest level of per pupil funding in Cambridgeshire at more than £8,000 per child compared with the median of £4,400 per child.*

- The Council should attract more families from outside the catchment area to help the school's viability.

LA response: *The LA cannot market any school in its area. The education model is that of parents being able to express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend.*

Those considered within the LA's control / influence

- Change the catchment area of the school to increase the geographical area e.g., to include Glatton.

LA response: *Expanding the catchment area could only be undertaken in line with the School Admissions Code 2021 and would require a further consultation process to be undertaken. The earliest this could happen would be Autumn 2023 and could not be implemented for entry before September 2025. This assumes that the expansion was not subject to objections to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator and a contrary decision from the Adjudicator. Changing the catchment area of a school is a significant undertaking and there will always be gains and losses. Whilst broadening Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School's catchment might attract more pupils, it would need to be significantly broader than the addition of Glatton to make a positive difference to the school's financial challenges. It would also mean other pupils may have further to travel to their local school, and negatively impact the rolls of other schools. Expanding the catchment area would not necessarily result in greater pupil numbers. That would depend upon parental preference. The LA, therefore, does not consider this to be an option*

- Reduce from 3 classes to 2 classes. The school ran two classes once before in the recent past.

LA response: *The school ran a two-class structure just for the 2011-12 academic year when numbers on roll were 47 at January 2012 census (down from 59 in 2011) and it could afford then to provide some non-teaching support in both classes.*

Pupil numbers then increased to allow the school to revert back to a three-class structure in September 2012. Numbers on roll at the time of the October 2012 census were 64. Up until the end of the academic year 2012/13, Infant Class Size Funding operated which supported schools with low numbers in Reception and KS1 and the school benefited from this, e.g. in 2012/13, it received an additional £8030 in its budget.

Were the school to move from 3 classes to 2 classes in September 2023, they would be organised with Reception, Year (Yr) 1 and Yr2 pupils in one class (as now) and Yr3, Yr 4, Yr 5 and Yr 6 pupils (i.e. the whole of Key Stage 2 (KS2) in the second class.

Currently the numbers in Willow Class (Yrs 3 and 4) and Oak class (Yrs 5 and 6) enable a teacher and additional support staff in each of these two classes. The budget deficit for 2024/25 is forecast to be between £60k and £65k. With pupil numbers reduced further, it would not be financially viable to employ any Teaching Assistants for the academic year 2024/25 and all the KS2 children would be taught by a single teacher. Likewise, Cherry Class (Yrs R, 1 and 2) would have a single teacher and no support staff.

Creating a class across all four KS2 year groups would require a bespoke curriculum for the school and potentially for the individual children. This would require extensive child development knowledge alongside subject specific knowledge.

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.

Alongside this, the teacher would have to ensure effective provision and completion of the statutory assessments for year 4 and year 6. In addition, for any children who did not move into year 3 at the expected level, there would be the additional pressure of targeted intervention to narrow any gaps in learning.

In addition, 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.

A two-class structure is, therefore, not a viable option.

- Operate the school for Reception and Key Stage 1 (KS1) (Yr 1 and Yr 2) pupils only, with KS2 children attending a different school.

LA response: *The small numbers involved (10 or fewer) mean that this would not be viable*

Those considered within the school's control

- Academisation - see page 2 above
- Develop the school as a community hub.

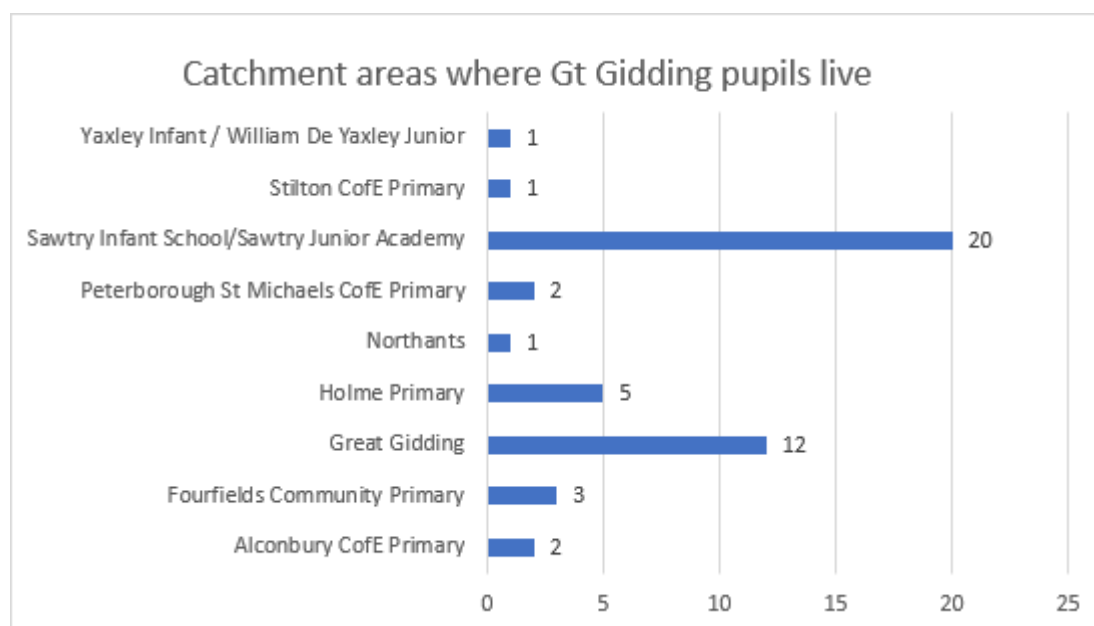
LA response: *Use of the school as a community hub would require money for upkeep, which would need to be funded by community events/services. Our research has concluded that the village hall and church are sufficient to meet the needs of the community and we have no indication that there is demand beyond what the village hall and church provide, and the services that are accessed in Sawtry (medical services, for example). See section below on impact on the local community.*

Transport Implications

Some families may be impacted by additional travel costs and travel time. The closure of the school may impact members of the community who would have to go beyond the local village to engage with their children's teachers.

The October 2022 Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC) recorded 47 pupils on roll. Only 12 (25%) of them reside in the Gt Gidding catchment while 35 (75%) lived in areas served by other schools.

Figure 1: Graph to show catchment areas where pupils on roll at Gt Gidding live



The January 2022 School Census also showed that of the 18 children living in the area served by Gt Gidding attending state funded schools in Cambridgeshire, 5 of them (28%) attended other state funded schools in the surrounding area.

The nearest alternative schools are between 3.1 and 7.1 miles away (as the crow flies) from Gt Gidding as shown in the table below. For the majority of pupils and families, these schools might be nearer to their home address.

Figure 2: Table showing alternative schools and their distance to Gt Gidding

School	Distance from Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School in miles (as the flies rounded)
Sawtry Infants	3.1
Sawtry Juniors	3.1
Folksworth CE VC P	4.5
Stilton CE Primary Academy	4.7
Brington CE VC P	5.1
Holme CE Primary Academy	5.5
Yaxley Infants	7.1
William de Yaxley CE Junior Academy	7.2
Fourfields P	7.3

The majority of pupils currently attending Gt Gidding are from outside the school's catchment area while a number of children living in-catchment travel to other schools. The majority of children, therefore, already face journeys to and from school each day.

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?

Analysis in January 2023 showed that of the 37 Reception to Year 5 pupils on roll at the time likely to be affected by the proposal, approximately 73% lived nearer/the same distance to an alternative school, with approximately 27% living further away. However, for many on roll at the school, their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance of their home address. Given the large proportion of children who attend Gt Gidding 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 that, 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. On the contrary, it would be expected that car usage would reduce.

The availability, and likely cost to the local authority, of transport to other schools

Since January 2023 numbers on roll have dropped further. Of the 8 children currently on roll (as at 20 February 2023) who reside in Gt Gidding's catchment 2 are in Yr 6 and will transfer to secondary phase in Sept 2023. The current contract cost is £110 per day/£20,900. In September 2023, the remaining 6 in-catchment on roll will be comprised of 2 pupils in Yr 6, 1 in Yr3 and 3 in Yr2. Estimated transport cost, based on current quotes, for them to attend primary provision in Sawtry (the nearest to Gt 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.

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.

Parents may express a preference for their child to attend any school, but if the school were to close, Sawtry Infant and Junior Schools would become the designated catchment school for children living in the villages currently served by Gt Gidding 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) would be approximately 30 minutes depending on the number of pick-up points.

In summary, the LA acknowledges that some pupils living in villages currently in catchment for Gt Gidding Primary Schools and attending the school, might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day. However, the 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 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance)

In conclusion, the proposal will not result in unreasonably long journey times.

[Home to school travel assistance policy \(cambridgeshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/cambridgeshire-transport-travel-guidance)

Size of the school and quality of education

Size of school

Gt Gidding is a small rural school with a published admission number of 14 and capacity for 98 pupils (14 x 7 year groups). The school is organised across 3 classes as follows:

- Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 class of 18
- Year 3 / 4 class of 10
- Year 5 / 6 class of 19

Source: School Census October 2022

Since the most recent height between 2013 and 2015 when total pupil numbers ranged from 70 to 75, pupil numbers have fluctuated between 56 and 66 between January 2016 and January 2018, and then continued to drop to 50 or below for the following 3 years. The October 2022 Pupil Lead Annual School Census (PLASC) recorded 47 pupils on roll. As of 31 January 2023, there were 44 pupils on roll. Since then (as of 20 February 2023), 14 have applied for, and 9 have already taken up, places elsewhere. In addition to this, 10 Yr 6 children will leave the school at the end of the current academic year to transfer to secondary phase.

Consequently, there is expected to be a maximum of 20 pupils on roll in September 2023. This could be as low as 13 if all the further 7 in-year applications for children to move elsewhere are successful.

The LA recognises that the consultation on the future of the school closure has led some parents to seek to move their children from Gt Gidding ahead of a decision being made. However, a steady downward trend was already established prior to 2022/23 and with it the increasing concern that due to the size and capacity of the school there are limitations to the provision which can be offered to pupils. Links with other schools are minimal. Specialist teaching, curriculum resourcing and enrichment opportunities are limited due to financial and human resource pressures. Wider opportunities outside of the school day are also limited to sport and Art for KS2 pupils. These will be further exacerbated when, for budgetary reasons, the school reaches the point of having to reduce from operating three classes to two, which given the numbers just referred to, would be the case September 2023.

Quality of Education

The LA 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. These are summarised in the table below.

Figure 3: LA engagement with Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School

Academic Year	Engagement with the LA
2015-16	10 notes of visit and a school review
2016-17	19 notes of visit and half termly review meetings
2017-18	18 notes of visit from subject/specialist advisers including early years, maths and English as well as 2 from the school improvement adviser.

Although the number of visits has since dropped to 8 visits a year, every year from 2018/19 the School Improvement Service has continued to maintain this level of support, including during the pandemic when 'visits' were provided online. This exceeds the usual entitlement of 5 visits from members of the School Improvement Service and does not include visits from other services such as the Early Years Service and the SEND Service.

In addition to curriculum support, a Strategic Leadership and Governance Review was carried out by the LA in October 2019. The findings from the review indicated that there were significant areas that required immediate improvement in order that the governing body carry out its functions effectively.

In September 2015 the 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 Requiring Improvement (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.

However, *the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now.*

E.g., SEND: *teaching has not been adapted consistently well. Some pupils with SEND receive less precise levels of support than others.* The school can expect to receive its next section 5 graded inspection within 12 to 24 months of November 2022.

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 practise 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.*

The educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools

- Trends in attainment data are difficult to gather, as the numbers of pupils in each cohort at a school the size of Gt Gidding Primary School are so small that percentages can be skewed quite significantly year on year.
- Due to these very small cohorts, it is highly unlikely that educational standards will be significantly impacted in neighbouring schools.
- In 2022:
 - 50% of pupils achieved a Good Level of Development at the end of Foundation Stage
 - 85.7% of pupils achieved the national standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 1. However, no pupils achieved learning at a greater depth.
 - 100% of pupils achieved the national standard for reading and half of these pupils achieved the national standard in Maths. No pupils achieved the national standard and in writing.
- The end of year predictions for 2023 paint a positive picture with many pupils across the school expected to meet or exceed the national standard. These predictions

exceed national averages, however as previously noted, such small numbers of pupils can sway data one way or the other quite significantly.

The proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community, i.e. whether the school is being used by the local community

The January 2022 the School Census recorded 18 children living in the catchment area served by Gt Gidding Primary School attending state funded schools in Cambridgeshire. This number has dropped in the last 5 years. 5 of them (28%) attended other schools in the surrounding. This latter number has risen in the past 5 years.

Figure 4: Table showing the number of children living within the catchment and the proportion attending Gt Gidding in the last 5 years

Year (January census)	Number of 4-11year olds living in the catchment area	Number (%) attending Gt Gidding Primary	Number (%) attending other state funded primary schools
Jan 2017	23	21 (91%)	2 (9%)
Jan 2018	28	24 (86%)	4 (14%)
Jan 2019	25	19 (76%)	6 (24%)
Jan 202	23	17 (74%)	6 (26%)
Jan 2021	21	14 (67%)	7 (33%)
Jan 2022	18	13 (72%)	5 (28%)

The overall and long-term impact on local people and the community of the closure of the school and of the loss of the building as a community facility

The majority of respondents to the consultation classified themselves as resident within the school community (not a parent, governor or member of staff) or former employees, former pupils or close friends / family members of children at the school or pupils. The LA recognises that the majority of respondents strongly disagree with a proposal to close the school.

The school is seen as an important part of the village and its loss could have an impact on community life. This is addressed in more detail in the **Community Impact Assessment** appended to the main Committee report.

A demographic comparison of Gt Gidding and similar Cambridgeshire villages without schools or where schools previously closed indicates that populations remain stable.

In small communities, schools can be a key provider of services other than education, but this is not the case in Gt Gidding. Local community services have not traditionally been provided at the primary school. Family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access are all provided elsewhere. There are:

- doctors' surgery and chemist in both Alconbury and Sawtry
- dentists in Sawtry (private) and Huntingdon and Peterborough (NHS)
- family and adult learning opportunities in Sawtry through the community college and through CARESCO charity based in Sawtry which exists to serve the local community in Sawtry and its satellite villages which includes the Giddings and Winwick
- Sawtry Eye Magazine) published monthly (by CARESCO) details all activities in the local area
- Monthly library bus service to Gt Gidding
- Library in Sawtry with free access to PCs and the internet

Gt Gidding used to provide wrap around care before school, after school or during the holidays but no longer does so due to lack of interest making it unviable.

There is no Early Years provision on site at the school or elsewhere in the village.

Were the school to close, none of the above services would be affected.

The economic benefits that a school brings to a community must be considered beneficial side effects to the main duty of a school which is to provide a quality education to its pupils. Academic standards and overall viability must be the major considerations in any decision on the future of a school and, while a community may be impacted by a decision to close a school; this cannot be an overriding factor. If the school closed, the local shop and pub would be unable to rely on passing trade from the school community and their families. This is already the case for 13 weeks of the year during school holidays. It would be for the local community to consider how to support local retail facilities.

School organisation and capacity of good schools to accommodate displaced pupils

Table X below shows the actual number of pupils on roll during the October 2022 school census. The information shows that there were 1733 pupils on roll across nine schools within 7.5m (as the crow flies) of Gt Gidding, with 1849 places available if all schools were operating up to their published admission number (PAN). This results in 116 (6.3%) surplus places across these schools.

Figure 5: Table showing pupil numbers and places available within 7.5 miles of Gt Gidding (October 2022)
Data source: October 2022 school census

Capacity	Ofsted rating	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total	Capacity	Deficit (-) / Surplus
Sawtry Infant School	Good	60	62	61	60					183	180	-3
Sawtry Junior Academy	Good	65				57	55	83	73	268	260	-8
Folksworth CE Primary	Good	15	14	9	12	17	16	11	16	95	105	10
Stilton CE Primary Academy	Good	30	28	14	18	17	27	25	26	155	210	55
Brington CE Primary	Good	17	16	15	15	17	12	19	15	109	119	10
Holme CE Primary	Good	17	22	18	15	16	15	17	15	118	119	1
Yaxley Infants School	Good	60	53	40	39					132	180	48
William de Yaxley CE Junior School	RI	64				53	57	59	58	227	256	29
Fourfields Primary	Good	60	58	60	60	89	60	60	59	446	420	-26
Combined total on roll			253	217	219	266	242	274	262	1733		
Capacity (if operating to PAN)		388	259	259	259	268	268	268	268		1849	
Deficit (-) / Surplus			6	42	40	2	26	-6	6			116

This information has been used to forecast the number of places required across the same schools for the following academic year (2023/24) – See Table X. The forecast takes account of birth rates, trends in actual numbers, and planned housing development. For example, for Sawtry Infant School there were 62 children on roll in September 2022, but due to birth rate and housing development within the village, this figure is expected to increase to 82 children entering reception in September 2023.

These forecasts have been used to assess the capacity of schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils from Gt Gidding in September 2023 should it close on 31 August 2023.

Figure 6: Table showing provisional pupil numbers within 7,5 miles of Gt Gidding (October 2022)

Data source: Pupil forecasts October 2022

Name of school	Ofsted rating	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total (R-Y6)	Capacity	Deficit (-) / Surplus
Sawtry Infant School	Good	60	82	57	60					199	180	-19
Sawtry Junior Academy	Good	65				59	60	56	83	258	260	2
Folksworth CE Primary	Good	15	9	15	8	13	16	15	11	87	105	18
Stilton CE Primary Academy	Good	30	11	29	14	13	13	26	23	129	210	81
Brington CE Primary	Good	17	13	17	18	16	21	19	20	124	119	-5
Holme CE Primary	Good	17	13	17	17	16	16	16	17	112	119	7
Yaxley Infants School	Good	60	52	53	45					150	180	30
William de Yaxley CE Junior School	RI	64				43	50	53	60	206	256	50
Fourfields Primary	Good	60	55	61	60	59	89	58	59	441	420	-21
Combined total on roll			235	249	222	219	265	243	273	1706		
Capacity (if operating to PAN)		388	259	259	259	268	268	268	268		1849	
Deficit (-) / Surplus			24	10	37	49	3	25	-5			143

Pupil numbers across the nine schools are forecast to decrease by 27 to 1,706 in October 2023, with surplus places increasing from 6.3% to 7.7%.

If Gt Gidding's forecast of 39 pupils on roll for 2023/24 were to be absorbed by the nine schools, there would be 1,745 pupils and a remaining surplus of 104 places, or 5.6%.

It is acknowledged that William de Yaxley CE Junior School is currently RI which may influence parental choice. Even without this school, there are sufficient places amongst the remaining 8 schools to accommodate displaced pupils, with a remaining surplus of 54 or 3.4%.

Schools operate most efficiently and effectively when full or nearly full. To this end the local authority 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”.

In this case, an overall capacity of 5.6% leaves surplus at the bare minimum and the capacity is not evenly spread across all year groups.

In the longer term, a new school planned to open in Sawtry in September 2024 to make provision for children arising from new developments in Sawtry will also mitigate the impact of displaced pupils wanting to take up a place in a Sawtry school.

Whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local areas which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term)

In light of the above availability of alternative school places if Gt Gidding Primary were to close, the LA would regard it as surplus to requirement and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term.

March 2023