



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cllr Bryony Goodliffe
Chair of the Children and Young People's Committee
Cambridgeshire County Council
New Shire Hall
Alconbury Weald
PE28 4YE

31 March 2023

Dear Cllr Goodliffe,

Proposed closure of Great Gidding Church of England School

I write to object to the closure of Great Gidding Church of England Primary School in Great Gidding, Huntingdonshire ("the school"). Many of my constituents have approached me with serious concerns about the impact that the proposed closure will have on children, parents, and the local community. I share those concerns.

Since its founding by the Church of England in 1845, the school has played a crucial role in the village and surrounding area. The school educates children not just from Great Gidding, but also from Little Gidding, Steeple Gidding, Hamerton, Winwick, Sawtry, and other villages further away.

I object to the proposal for the following reasons:

- Closing the school will have a severe, detrimental impact on its pupils. This is especially true for those who benefit from smaller class sizes and more nurturing environments, for whom alternative schools may not be appropriate, such as the school's relatively high proportion of students with special educational needs and disabilities. Pupils will inevitably face anxiety about their futures, impacting their learning and disrupting their development.
- Parents will be negatively affected by the closure. For many, this will mean reorganising childcare and travel arrangements, which will at best inconvenience and at worst incur additional household costs at a time of great economic anxiety.
- Teachers and support staff will lose their jobs, and may not be able to readily find alternative employers given the rural nature of the area. This may well be detrimental to their wellbeing, and may reduce the total number of teachers in Cambridgeshire.



- The closure of this rural school, which is being carried out by Cambridgeshire County Council, is in direct opposition to statutory guidance issued by the Government. That advice, issued in January 2023 by the Department for Education (DfE), states that: “Proposers should be aware that the department expects all decision makers to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools.”
- The DfE’s guidance further states that, in relation to rural primary schools, proposers must have regard to the discontinuance of the school on the local community. This includes the availability of other schools, the associated costs of relocating pupils, as well as the overall long-term impact of the closure and loss of the building as a community facility. These factors clearly have not been considered by the Council.
- Parents know their children best, and are well placed to make decisions about what is best for them. Parents should be provided with as much choice as possible to ensure that they can send their children to the school that they think will be most suitable for their children's needs and interests. Removing a school from their list of options completely goes against this important principle.
- Parents should not be deprived of access to a Church of England school, particularly when the Council accepts that places at alternative denominational schools may not be available.
- The school is at the heart of the local community, and its closure will negatively affect local businesses and community groups, such as the village shop and St Michael’s Church, both of which have close links with the school.
- Closing the school will mean the loss of an important “pull factor” encouraging families to move to the area. Young, economically active people with children are an asset to local communities and economies, and that is especially the case in rural areas such as Great Gidding.
- The Council’s demographic forecasts fail to take account of future housing developments which will likely increase the number of school-aged children living in Great Gidding and the surrounding area.
- These demographic forecasts also fail to factor in the “expectancy effect” that announcing the probable closure of the school will have on the pupils attending it; it is understandable that parents would seek to withdraw their children from an educational setting at risk of closure, thereby giving false weight to the Council’s argument about a “downward trend of numbers on roll.”
- The Council cites concern about the governing body’s difficulties in recruiting a Headteacher. However, former governors have said that the Council provided insufficient support in this endeavour. In the autumn of last year, many governors resigned over the matter. It is totally unfair to punish pupils, parents, and staff for what is ultimately a failure by the Council.



- The Council argues that the school's "per pupil" cost of £8,750 is the highest in the county, and suggests that this is one of the reasons for closure. However, it is inevitable, in any context, that one school's costs will be the highest. Were Great Gidding school to close, it would simply be the case that another school would take its place; by the Council's logic, that school should then potentially face closure too.

- Schools are not businesses, and should not be run on business principles, especially in rural areas where they not only provide education for children but also serve as the bedrock of communities.

I strongly believe that Great Gidding Church of England Primary School should remain open, and object to its proposed closure.

Yours sincerely



Rt Hon Shailesh Vara MP