

Sustainable Communities for Learning Consultation Report

Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhydney Primary School



Proposal : **To create a sustainable Net Zero Carbon school buildings with shared facilities to accommodate Ysgol Y Lawnt, Upper Rhydney Primary School and Community use.**

Formal Consultation Period : 28th September 2023 – 9th November 2023

This report is published in line with the requirements of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018.



Cymunedau **Dysgu** Cynaliadwy 
Sustainable Communities for **Learning**



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



Richard Edmunds

Corporate Director for
Education and Corporate
Services

FOREWORD

“Working together to deliver the best outcomes for all our children”

Caerphilly County Borough Council has embarked upon an exciting but challenging journey of improvement and change. We have bold ambitions to provide every learner with the best life chances and we are committed to doing this through the provision of high quality teaching, learning and leadership across our school settings as part of our Education Strategy – Pursuing Excellence Together.

We have focused on improving young people’s outcomes and this is still a priority area moving forward incorporating a holistic view of education. The Council has adopted ‘Improving education opportunities for all’ as the first of its Wellbeing Objectives and has committed to an ambitious Sustainable Communities for Learning investment programme.

In collaboration with Welsh Government, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Programme is supporting investment in education within the County Borough. Our aspiration is the improvement of the condition of school buildings and maximising community usage.

Our current proposals support our commitment to increase school effectiveness and to narrow inequalities in achievement across groups; to understand the needs of more vulnerable children; promote the Welsh Language, and support those unable to access traditional learning pathways to ensure that all will benefit from the richness of learning and cultural opportunities. These principles help steer our decision making and prioritise projects.

As part of this proposal a consultation exercise has been carried out in line with the requirements of the School Organisation Code 2018. All stakeholders have had the opportunity to participate and make comments.

This Consultation Report has been produced to summarise the emerging themes raised by consultees during the consultation period including Estyn’s feedback. It aims to provide a balanced, transparent document to support Cabinet in deciding whether to progress with the proposal, make changes or not to progress.

I hope you find this document informative as a reflection of the activities undertaken to date and an insight into the journey we are on, shaping delivery and placing learning provision at the heart of our communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Executive Summary ➤ Statutory Obligations ➤ Purpose of the Consultation Report ➤ What is the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme? 	
Proposal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What are we proposing to do? ➤ What is driving this proposal? ➤ Options Appraisal ➤ Benefits and Disbenefits 	
The Consultation Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation Process ➤ Stakeholder Engagement ➤ Consultation Information ➤ Response Methods 	
Consultation Responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation Responses ➤ Scrutiny Committee Response ➤ Estyn's Response (summary) 	
Learner Voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ School Council / Pupil Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Schools directly affected by Proposal ○ Other schools identified as being affected 	
Other Considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consultation Clarification ➤ Reasonable Alternatives Identified 	
Next Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recommendation ➤ Decision Making ➤ Reporting, Notification and Publishing of Information 	
Supporting Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Annex 1: Key Consultation Documents ➤ Annex 2: Estyn's Response (Full version) 	

This document is available in Welsh and English. Information can also be made available in other formats, languages and in hard copy on request. Please contact us on 01443 864817 to arrange this.



INTRODUCTION

Executive Summary

Schools in Wales need to be in good condition and suitable for the delivery of education. In some cases, schools can be modernised, repaired, refurbished, extended, or partially rebuilt to meet the standards needed for contemporary teaching and learning. However, some existing schools are no longer in the right place and in such cases, we might propose new schools or changes to existing schools.

Caerphilly County Borough Council aspires to continue to raise school standards and improve the quality of the learning environment to create fit-for-purpose 21st century schools and give every child in Caerphilly the best possible start in life.

For proposals relating to schools, the School Organisation Code 2018, provides clear statutory guidance as to the processes that need to be adhered to. Undertaking a consultation exercise is one of the initial stages of progressing any proposal and is subject to Welsh Government and Cabinet approval.

From the 28th September 2023 to the 9th November 2023 a consultation exercise was undertaken.

The purpose of the consultation was to gain views on the proposal to create a sustainable Net Zero Carbon school buildings with shared facilities, to accommodate Ysgol Y Lawnt, Upper Rhymney Primary School and Community use. The two schools will continue to provide both Welsh and English Medium Primary education and remain as separate entities, situated within the new dual purpose building.

This Consultation Report is the prescribed method as outlined by the School Organisation Code 2018 for reflection, review and assessment to provide Cabinet with the information to make an informed decision as to whether to proceed with the proposal to the next stage, amend the proposal taking into account further information that has come forward through the consultation process or to close this proposal with no further actions taken.

The Report is divided into several sections with the aim to:

- Outline the consultation processes undertaken
- Provide clarification in relation to the information provided and consultee engagement
- Summarise each of the issues raised by consultees
- Set out Estyn's response to the consultation in full
- Respond to issues raised by means of clarification, amendment to the proposal or rejection of the concerns, with supporting reasons

Statutory Obligations

This report is published in line with the requirements of the [School Standards and Organisation \(Wales\) Act 2013](#) and the [School Organisation Code 2018](#).

The Consultation report will be published on the Caerphilly Sustainable Communities for Learning website with hardcopies available on request. All information is published in Welsh and English. In addition, a child friendly summary has also been produced to ensure information is provided in an accessible format for any children and young people affected by the proposals.

Purpose of the Consultation Report

The publication of this Consultation Report discharges the Council of its duty under the School Organisation Code 2018.

The consultation period represented an opportunity for people to learn about the proposal, ask questions and make comments. Any negative responses made during the consultation period were not counted as objections to the proposal but as adverse comments.

Objections to a proposal can only be registered after the publication of a statutory notice.

The Consultation Report outlines the processes followed, provides clarity on the issues and comments received from consultees, ensures that the views of children and young people affected by the proposal are expressed and ultimately, provides Cabinet with the necessary information to take one of the following decisions:

- Proceed with the proposal
- Make changes to the proposal
- Not to proceed with the proposal

Full details of the decision making process and the stages of the proposal as outlined in the School Organisation Code 2018 have been published as part of the initial Consultation Document and is publicly available via the Council's website with hardcopies made available on request.

What is the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme?

The Sustainable Communities for Learning programme is a major, long-term, strategic capital investment programme. It is jointly funded by the Welsh Government and local authorities and aims to create a generation of 21st century schools in Wales.

We identified a need to invest in improving our school buildings, meeting the demand for education in both Welsh and English, reducing surplus places and developing shared and co-located facilities. Our aspiration is to provide efficient and effective educational infrastructure that will meet current and future demand for places and for all facilities that receive investment committed to optimising the use of the infrastructure and resources, making assets available for community use.

Band A funding in Caerphilly was used to deliver :

	Project Name	Band A Investment
Image of Islwyn High School	✓ Islwyn High School	£22.6m
	✓ Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Rhymni, Y Gwyndy Campus	£19.2m
	✓ Idris Davies School 3-18	£8m
	✓ Newbridge School extension	£2.6m
	✓ Blackwood Comprehensive improvements	£2m
	✓ Blackwood Comprehensive 3G pitch	£865k
	✓ Trinity Fields School improvements	£1.3m

Band B funding is being used to deliver :

 <p>Artist Impression of new YG Cwm Gwyddon</p>	Project Name Band B Investment
	✓ Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Gwyddon
	✓ Trinity Fields School expansion
	✓ Pupil Referral Unit, Pontllanfraith
	✓ Llancaeath/Llanfabon School amalgamation
✓ Plasyfelin Primary School 'Our 1 st Net Zero Carbon School'	

Educational transformation remains a vital outcome of our investment in Band B of the Programme, with the priority areas being:

- Reduce the number of poor condition schools
- Ensure that we have the right size schools in the right location
- Provide enough places to deliver Welsh and English medium education
- Ensure the effective and efficient use of the educational estate

Further information is available on the [Sustainable Communities for Learning webpages](#)

PROPOSAL

What are we proposing to do?

We are proposing to:

- **Relocation of Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School**

The proposal seeks to create a sustainable Net Zero Carbon school buildings with shared facilities, to accommodate Ysgol Y Lawnt, Upper Rhymney Primary School and Community use.

Artist Impression



It must be emphasised that both schools would remain independent entities, the existing catchment areas would remain unchanged and each school would occupy their own separate teaching areas within the new building.

- The new building will incorporate primary school facilities as well as childcare and separate Special Resource Base provision for each school, one with 8 places for Welsh medium and the other providing 8 places for English medium.
- The proposed new building will include a shared bi-lingual reception area and flexible and adaptable communal facilities for example a Hall that can be subdivided and a separate kitchen servery so that provision is delivered in the appropriate language medium for each school. The configuration of these facilities will be designed in a manner enabling independent use by each school respectively if needed to minimise infringement on current activities or opened up for shared utilisation to provide wider community cohesion.
- The new primary school site will have improved outside learning space and facilities that will be segregated between each school to provide stimulating teaching and learning environments with 21st Century facilities centred on the learning, self-esteem and well-being of all pupils.
- The proposed project will take into account the desire to encourage and facilitate community use of the entire building, in partnership with both Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School. The design will seek to include measures to enable safe 'zoning' which can be utilised by the wider community. It should be noted that any existing community provision at the existing schools would be encouraged to relocate to the new site which will have upgraded facilities.

Each school will retain their existing Governing Body arrangements, however, a joint committee will be established consisting of representatives from both schools to establish terms and conditions about the working mechanisms relating to maintenance, access and general policies relating the site as a whole.

Building on the Net Zero Carbon mandate our proposal is framed to demonstrate innovative and collaborative design, encompassing the built environment and the surrounding landscape in a way that enriches pupils' daily life.

Through developing a sustainable, flexible site, this would enable:

- Space maximisation for reconfiguration of site
- Shared communal facilities including adaptable hall, community room, kitchen and storage capable of delivering the universal free school meals offer
- A longer elemental lifespan
- Lower whole life cost
- Improved value for money

For reference, a similar approach has been taken by Cardiff Council as part of their Gabalfa Primary School and Ysgol Gymraeg Glan Ceubal project, whereby both schools are co-located in a building with shared communal facilities and continue to operate successfully as separate entities delivering Welsh and English education.

What is driving this proposal?

Proposals have been prioritised based on a number of factors including building condition, pupil projection and local and national drivers, however, the delivery of the curriculum and the Educational agenda remains at the core.

Options Appraisal

The planning and development of effective school organisation proposals is crucial to the Welsh Government's goal of transforming education in Wales and providing better educational outcomes with a commitment to increase school effectiveness, and narrow inequalities in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged areas, groups and individuals.

The Welsh Government's Business Case Guidance in relation to utilisation of the Options Framework approach has been followed to identify the widest possible number of feasible options, focusing on the following key dimensions: scope, service solution, service delivery, implementation and funding.

An options appraisal provides the opportunity to help councils make an informed and evidence based decision on how to deliver services. It does this by considering the relative advantages and disadvantages of a number of different delivery model options (including the current way in which the service is delivered).

The methodology helps decision makers to consider the:

- Desirability - the degree to which each option meets the strategic objectives and priorities of stakeholders
- Viability - the degree to which each option is financially viable and sustainable
- Feasibility - the degree to which each option can be implemented

As part of outlining the current proposal, an options appraisal was undertaken.

The options appraisal stage allowed for a number of different delivery model options to be explored and evaluated against a set of agreed criteria, leading to the selection of the preferred option.

Table 1: Options Appraisal Longlist	
Option	Longlist Options: Description
Option 1	Do Nothing : No change to existing schools
Option 2	Do Minimum: Internal refurbishments of both school sites
Option 3a	Do Intermediate: Develop on existing Ysgol Y Lawnt site only
Option 3b	Do Intermediate Develop on existing Upper Rhymney School site only
Option 3c	Do Intermediate Relocation of one/both schools into alternative existing school stock (if available)

Option 4	Do Major: Build two new Net Zero Carbon school buildings to accommodate each school respectively on the new site
Option 5	Do Maximum Build a single new Net Zero Carbon school building, with shared communal facilities, accommodating both schools on the new site

Each option was evaluated against the investment objectives outlined in the Consultation Document and the extent to which it met the Critical Success Factors. This stage was an important part of the process, to raise important questions at an early stage and assist in developing proposals.

This resulted in options either being discounted, carried forward for further consideration in the short list with an eventual option identified as a preferred way forward. It is the option identified as the preferred way forward upon which the consultation exercise was based as all other options have been discounted at this point.

The process utilised was outlined in detail in the Consultation Document and resulted in

Option 5 being identified as the preferred option, namely, **Build a single new Net Zero Carbon school buildings, with shared communal facilities, accommodating both schools on the new site.**

Benefits and Disbenefits

There are common challenges faced by all Local Authorities when adopting new proposals. The vast majority of Council policies are delivered through projects and programmes of various forms. It is therefore vital that projects are delivered successfully in order to realise their intended benefits for citizens.

Evidence shows that the best way to ensure successful delivery is by setting up projects correctly in the first place. The most common causes of failure, among others are a lack of clear objectives, insufficient resources and over-ambitious cost and schedule that impact on the level and amount of benefit that can be realised and can be avoided if tackled in a project's early stages.

As part of the development of the proposal, a number of benefits and disbenefits were identified as outlined in the Consultation Document. The consultation process was an opportunity to consult with relevant stakeholders to understand what they see as positive outcomes and what negative consequences may be delivered.

The Council recognises that people have different needs, requirements and goals and we will work actively against all forms of discrimination by promoting good relations and mutual respect within and between our communities. An Integrated Impact Assessment was carried out to initiate discussion and invite comments as to whether the principles for the proposal are supported.

All comments have been recorded and Cabinet members will be provided with copies of all the responses received within the consultation period and in their original format as part of the decision making process.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Consultation Process

The consultation process has followed the Welsh Government guidelines as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018.

Stakeholder Engagement

Through [TeamCaerphilly - Better Together](#), the Council is committed to ensuring high quality, citizen focused services for the communities that comprise our county borough. In future-proofing public services, we recognise the need to ensure effective engagement which is central to our decision making - [Read more about our approach to Consultation and Engagement here](#)

For this proposal, our consultation process must follow the Welsh Government Statutory guidance as set out in the School Organisation Code 2018.

The following consultees were advised of our proposals by letter or email:

Table 2: Consultee List	
Pupils and Pupil Councils*	Welsh Ministers
Parents, prospective parents, guardians and carers*	Assembly Members and Members of Parliament representing the area served *
Headteacher, Staff and Governing bodies*	Local CCBC Members
Directors of Education for Neighbouring Authorities	Local Town and Community Councils
Teaching and Support Staff Associations	Estyn
Parent Network	Welsh Education Forum
Diocesan Directors / Boards of Education	South East Wales Consortium (EAS)
Gwent and South Wales Police and Crime Commissioners	South East Wales Transport Alliance (SEWTA)
Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership	Mudiad Meithrin, Menter Iaith and voluntary nursery providers

**of schools directly or likely to be affected by the proposal only*

In addition to advising those we were obliged to under the stakeholder criteria, the following were also contacted and advised of our proposals in writing:

- All Headteachers in the Borough
- Welsh Language Commissioner

Consultation Information

The School Organisation Code 2018 states that when undertaking a consultation process in connection with a school proposal, the Council must publish information to enable transparent, balanced and open decision making.

The consultation document must be published on a school day and consultees must be given at least 42 days to respond to the document, with at least 20 of these being school days as defined by Section 579 of the Education Act 1996. The consultation period opened on Thursday 28th September 2023 (a school day) and concluded at midnight on Thursday 9th November 2023.

As part of this proposal, the following documentation was produced:

- Consultation Notification Letter
- Consultation Document
- Child Friendly Summary Presentation
- Consultation Response Form
- Integrated Impact Assessment

All documentation was published in Welsh and English, complying with the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards. Information was also available in other languages and formats on request, however, no such requests were received as part of this process.

Hardcopies of the documentation were issued to the schools directly affected by the proposal including the child friendly summary for discussion with the pupils.

In addition to notifying the consultees in writing of the proposal, distribution of information was supported via the school text messaging service direct to parents and staff.

A child friendly consultation summary was also produced to support the consultation process with pupils of the affected schools to present information in a manner relevant to their likely understanding, allowing them to participate in the consultation process and reach an informed opinion. In addition to this documentation, local teaching staff provided assistance to children and young people who wished to submit a consultation response in their preferred format and language.

The Council's Social media channels were also utilised.

Response Methods

As outlined in the Consultation Document, anyone wishing to comment in relation to the proposal could do so in writing by:

- Completing the online response form on the Council's website
- Completing a response pro forma and posting it to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team at Caerphilly
- Emailing comments to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Team at Caerphilly

Pupils of the schools directly affected by the proposal were also given the opportunity to engage in the process through focused 'Pupil Voice' sessions.

The response forms were designed in such a way as to capture the relevant information required to discharge the Council's obligations required under the School Organisation Code for undertaking a consultation linked to the regulated alteration of a maintained school.

This consultation was undertaken to capture the views of consultees in relation to the proposal. These views have been incorporated into this document, which will be published and considered by Cabinet when determining whether to proceed to Statutory notice stage. A separate Planning Application Process will be undertaken in respect of this proposal. The separate statutory processes were outlined in the consultation document and any adverse comments received as part of this process have been recorded as such.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultation Responses

Overall a total of 19 responses were received during the consultation process.

Please note: The figure above and the data reported on for Questions 1 to 7 does not include the responses received by Estyn, Scrutiny or captured as part of any pupil engagement sessions. These are outlined in more detail later in this document.

Of the prescribed methods for providing a response during the consultation period:

- 18 responses received via Online Survey
- 1 responses received via email
- 0 responses received via post

1 response of the 19 (5%) was returned in the medium of Welsh.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Team received no requests for the documentation to be provided in any additional format or languages to those already available.

QUESTION 1

The consultees were provided an overview of the investment objectives for the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme and asked to confirm the proposal they were responding to as part of the process.

QUESTION 2

The consultees were asked to identify a category that best described them in relation to the proposal for the school affected. The options provided were selected to demonstrate that the key consultee groups as outlined in the School Organisation Code had been engaged with. These included, Parent, Staff Member, School Governor, Elected Member, Local Resident, Group and Other.

Of those who responded, the following categories were selected:

5% (1)* Pupil	32% (6)* Parents	10% (2)* Staff Members	5% (1) Elected Members	32% (6) Local Resident	11% (2) Groups	5% (1) Other
---------------------	------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------------------	----------------------	--------------------

**As per a breakdown:*

- The 1 pupil response failed to provide any identifiable information.
- Of The 6 parents who responded, 2 have children attending Ysgol Y Lawnt and 4 have children attending Upper Rhymney Primary School.
- Both Staff Members attend Upper Rhymney Primary School.

For those selecting 'other', the opportunity was given to elaborate further as they felt appropriate.

All comments have been recorded and Cabinet members will be provided with copies of all the responses received within the consultation period and in their original format as part of the decision making process.

QUESTIONS 3 TO 7

As part of the consultation process, consultees were asked to provide basic contact information, including their name, address and email. This psychographic data was collected in order to help paint a picture of the consultee and enable the Sustainable Communities for Learning team to understand trends in response data and response groupings that would assist in compiling this Consultation Report.

As information can be collected for many purposes, the Caerphilly County Borough Council's privacy notice for consultations/surveys was referenced, which outlined the purpose and legal basis for collecting the information, data usage and data retention periods.

For the purposes of this Consultation Report, Cabinet will be provided with a separate digest of all the consultation comments received. Please note that comments that are considered to be offensive or compromise anonymity have been edited or removed.

QUESTION 8

As part of our duty under the School Organisation Code 2018, consultees must be given the option to request notification as to the publication of this Consultation Report. Contact information has been collected to this end and the preferred method for communication will be notification via email if this information has been made available by the respondent.



16 out of the 19 respondents have requested notification. These individuals have been added to the notification list and will be contacted concurrently with stakeholders when this document is made publicly available through the Council's website. Hardcopies of the documentation will be made available on request.

QUESTION 9

Consultees were asked to indicate "To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" Of those who responded to these questions:

- 1) Ysgol Y Lawnt would benefit from a new school & facilities.
13 agreed, 3 disagreed, 2 did not feel strongly either way

- 2) Upper Rhymney Primary School would benefit from a new school & facilities.
13 agreed, 3 disagreed, 2 did not feel strongly either way

QUESTION 10

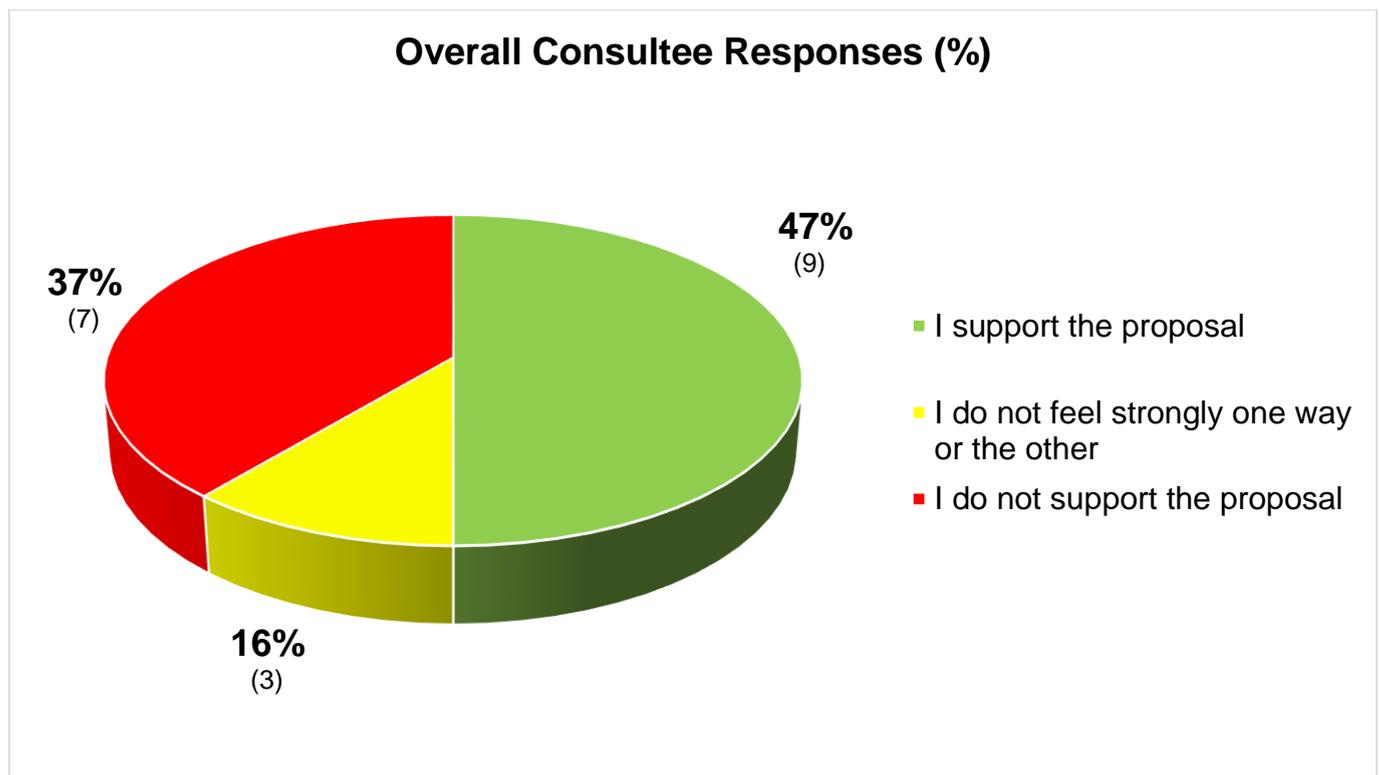
Consultees can submit their views either in favour of or against the proposals.

Consultees were asked to indicate which of the following statements most accurately reflected their views about the proposal. Consultees were reminded to read the consultation documentation prior to providing any responses during this consultation exercise and that unfavourable comments made during the consultation period will not be treated as objections at this stage.

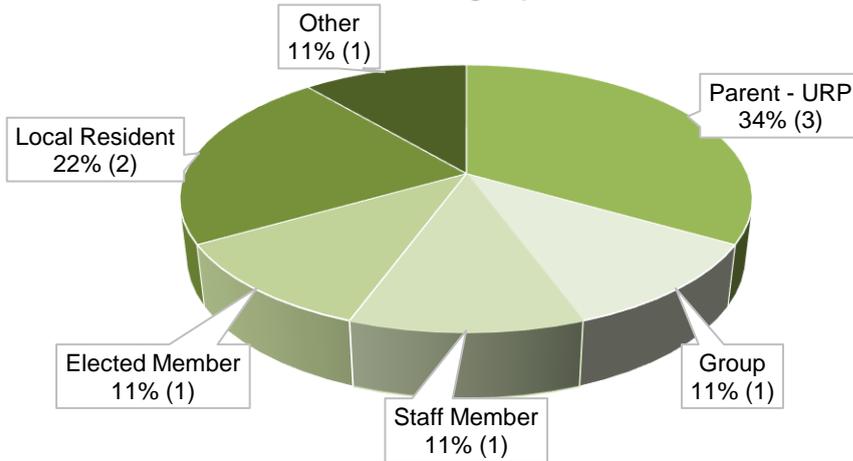
The options available were:

- I support the proposal
- I do not feel strongly one way or the other
- I do not support the proposal

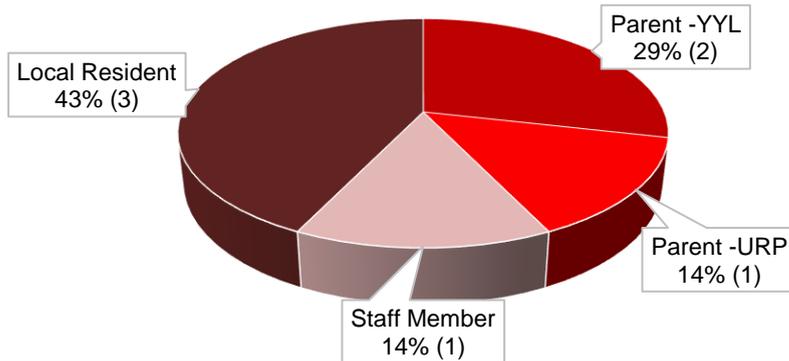
Of the 19 responses returned, 9 support the proposal, 7 do not support it, 3 either didn't feel strongly either way or failed to select an option.



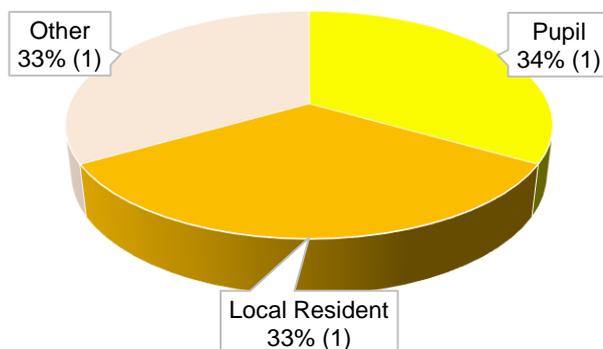
"I support the proposal"
47% (9) of overall responses broken down by category



"I do not support the proposal"
37% (7) of overall responses broken down by category



"I do not feel strongly one way or the other"
16% (3) of overall responses broken down by category



It is prudent to bring to the attention of readers that the commentary provided as part of Questions 11 to 13 may offer additional insight into the views of the consultees and that the response provided to Question 10 should not be considered in isolation, for example where there are duplicate responses or multiple responses from a single household.

QUESTIONS 11 to 13

This was a free text box, enabling consultees to provide additional comments as to why they supported or did not support the proposal as outlined in the Consultation Document, or to suggest changes or alternative options that could improve the proposal.

All comments received have been read and analysed.

General themes that emerged from the consultation, including those raised at Scrutiny Committee:

- Proposed Location
- School Design
- Impact on Welsh Language
- Funding
- Project Timelines

These themes are outlined in more detail in the section on 'Consultation Clarification'.

QUESTIONS 14 to 19

In line with the Caerphilly County Borough Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020 and the Consultation and Monitoring Guidance 2016 document, a reduced version of the Equalities and Monitoring questionnaire was included as part of the consultation response to support effective planning and to ensure that a representative sample was achieved to identify any equality issues.

From the responses received, of those that completed the Equalities monitoring section:

I am ...			
Female	14	Prefer to self describe	0
Male	2	Prefer not to say	3

Age			
Under 16	0	40-65	7
16-25	2	Over 65	1
26-39	6	Prefer not to say	3

Disability			
Yes	3	No	12
Prefer not to say	4		

Preferred Language			
English	14	Other	0
Welsh	2	Prefer not to say	3

QUESTIONS 20 to 21

We have to make sure that the Welsh Language is treated in the same way as the English language.

Respondents were given the opportunity to make suggestions on how we can increase opportunities for people to use or access services in Welsh. In addition, respondents were able to comment on how the proposal could be changed to have (more of) a positive impact on the Welsh language.

Responses included:

- Provision of additional funding to Welsh Schools only
- Amend the proposal to a standalone Welsh Language School only
- Welsh Language Courses
- Working with Welsh Language Organisations

QUESTION 22

In relation to equalities implications that respondents highlighted, 1 respondent indicated that their decision was influenced based on a family member, but none indicated implications as per the list outlined in the consultation response form.

Scrutiny Response

The Council's Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee is a consultee for any policy or service developments in relation to Education within the Borough.

A Multi-Locational meeting (Penallta House & MS Teams) took place on Tuesday 17th October 2023 at 5.30pm.

As part of this meeting, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Programme and consultation in respect of the proposal for Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School was discussed as agenda item 7.

All consultation documentation was made available to members as part of the agenda reports pack and officers linked to the proposal were available to take questions. Any queries raised have been acknowledged and included as part of the themes analysis.

A recording of the session is available to view:

[Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting](#)

Estyn's Response

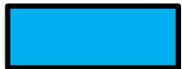
Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code 2018, the Council, as the proposers, is required to send a notification with regards to the consultation to Estyn.

Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales and their vision is to improve the quality of education and training and outcomes for all learners in Wales. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals.

Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal. The full response from Estyn is included as Annex 2 at the end of this document. However, in summary:

“Estyn considers that the proposal is likely to, at least, maintain the standard of education provision in the area.”

The Council acknowledges Estyn's response.



LEARNER VOICE

Young people have a right to act to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be heard and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

School Council / Pupil Engagement

The Council acknowledged that the voice of young people is about involving them as active participants in the development, delivery, management and improvement of their educational and student experience and needs to be at the heart of planning, provision and evaluation.

The Sustainable Communities for Learning Team in Caerphilly ensure that when bringing forward any proposal, suitable arrangements are made to consult and involve pupils throughout the process with the support of the local teaching teams.

A child friendly consultation summary was produced to support the consultation process with pupils to present information in a manner relevant to their likely understanding, allowing them to participate in the consultation process and reach an informed opinion.

➤ Schools directly affected by the proposal

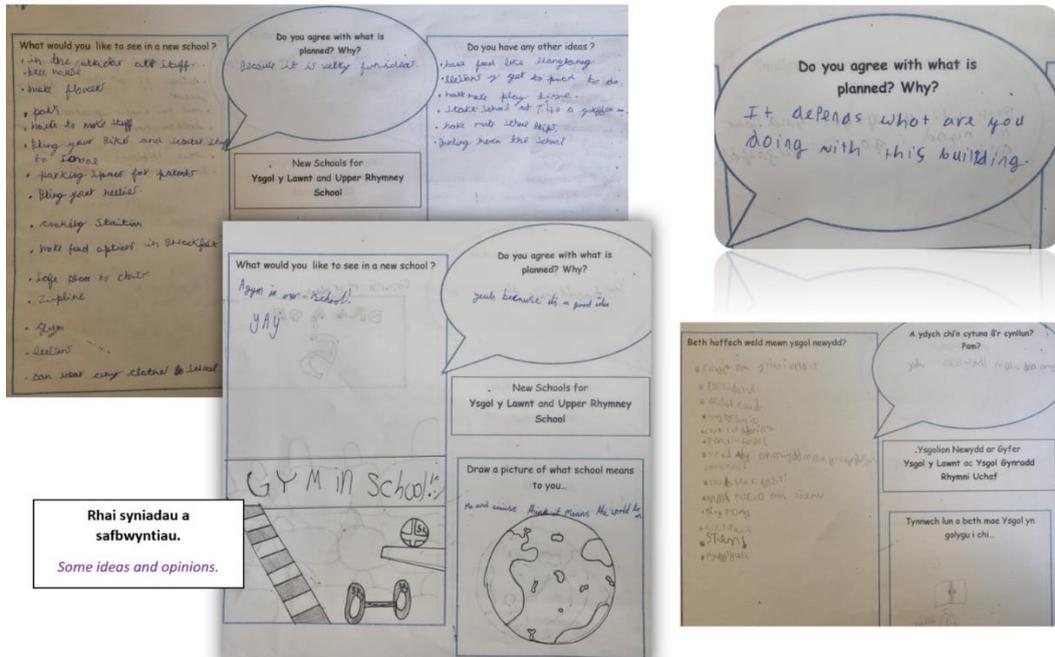
The proposal directly impacts on pupils at Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School. The School Councils, Eco Councils and wider pupil cohorts were encouraged to participate in the consultation process through a series of supported interactive sessions.

The pupils were asked:

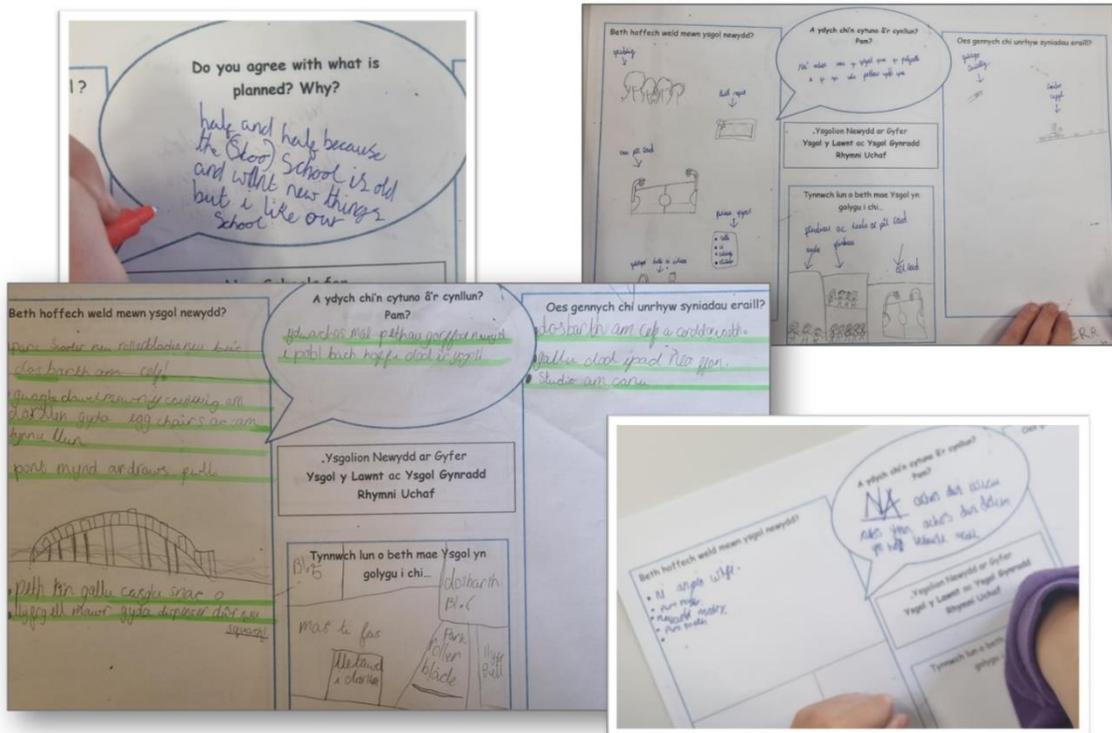
- Do they agree with what we are looking to do?
- Did they have any ideas of what they would want in a new school?
- Did they have any other ideas they'd like us to think about?

A selection of their responses is shown below:

Ysgol Y Lawnt:



Rhai syniadau a safbwyntiau.
Some ideas and opinions.





Images from a Consultation Sessions undertaken with pupils at Ysgol Y Lawnt

Upper Rhymney Primary School:

"We like the proposal; we want to keep our teachers; We like the new location; We would be happy to work with children from another school; I think the new school looks spacious; its only down the road; it would be nice as all of us will be in one building and not separate from infants" - Student Council





Images from a Consultation Sessions undertaken with Student Council at Upper Rhymney Primary School

Other Schools identified as being affected

The Head Teachers of other local schools in the area were contacted during the consultation period whereby the schools were invited to provide their responses as part of the consultation process. Where information has been submitted, responses are included as part of the separate annex available to Cabinet.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Consultation Clarification

When analysing all consultation response comments received as part of the consultation period, a number of emerging themes became evident.

Table 3: Summary of Response Themes		
Theme	Overview	Number of Mentions
Proposed Location	Travel Distance	4
	Site Safety & Security	2
	Site Access & Traffic	4
School Design	Concept Artwork	3
	Facilities	4
	Site Orientation	1

Impact on Welsh Language	Welsh and English Schools (precedents)	2
	Independent School Functions	3
	Site Operations	1
	Community Cohesion	1
Funding	School Funding Formula	2
	Project Funding and Cost	1
Project Timelines	Process Timeline	1
	Proposed Occupation Date	1

To assist Cabinet in the decision making process, the following information is provided by Council Officers involved in the formulation of the proposal by means of response for clarification with supporting reasons.

Proposed Location

➤ Travel Distance

A selection of consultees raised concerns with regards to the impact of the new location on those that currently walk to school, in addition, a concern was noted regarding taking Ysgol Y Lawnt out of the centre of Rhymney Town and its perceived catchment area. The distance between both schools and the proposed new build site is less than 1 mile at its maximum. As outlined in the Consultation Document, it is anticipated that the likely effect of different travelling arrangements as a result of the proposal will be minimal, although it is acknowledged that some pupils may find themselves living closer to the new site and conversely others finding themselves further away although the difference between the sites is minimal.

It should be noted that the catchment areas of both schools is wider than just the Rhymney Town area, especially in reference to Ysgol Y Lawnt, which accommodates catchment pupils from as South as New Tredegar to the most Northern Boarder of the Authority. As such Caerphilly complies with the requirements of the Learner Travel Measure (Wales) 2008 through providing transport for pupils of statutory school age in accordance with our individual transport policy. Caerphilly's transport policy is more generous than the legislative requirement by providing transport to the 'relevant' school (i.e. catchment or nearest school) of more than a distance of 1.5 miles primary. This is applicable for both Welsh and English medium schools.

➤ Site Safety & Security

Consultees raised concerns regarding site security e.g. fencing, allotment and forest areas.

For clarity, whilst no formal design process has been undertaken to date, as a minimum, a thorough risk assessment of the school site, taking account of site security, any public rights of way, traffic management arrangements and the condition of all buildings will assist the Local Authority and Schools to make appropriate arrangements to manage those risks appropriately

and ensure relevant external and internal measures are put into place, for example perimeter fencing, locking mechanisms, security lighting, signing in processes etc.

When in operation, it is the responsibility of the headteacher and governing body to ensure that the school site and its building(s) are safe. These arrangements will vary from school to school depending on the nature of the site and the age of the pupils on roll.

➤ Site Access & Traffic

A handful of consultees expressed concerns around the site location, road network and potential impact on traffic management and flow in the proposed area. It is always the intention of the Council to provide a system of transport that seeks to ensure pupils can safely and comfortably access their education.

A number of 'Safe Travel' routes, as far as reasonably practicable, are already established such as lighting and designated footpaths. During an initial site visit by the Sustainable Communities for Learning team, it has been identified that the access road, parking and designated bus/taxi turning points could potentially be improved, especially for Ysgol Y Lawnt, as part of the new site design process to alleviate any local traffic concerns and this will be taken into consideration at the relevant stages as the proposal progresses.

School Design

➤ Concept Artwork

As part of the consultation responses, queries were raised in relation to the configuration and layout of the school as shown in the diagrams provided in the Consultation Document. It should be emphasised that the images were only concept designs and no formal design process has been undertaken as the consultation process is intended to gain the views of stakeholders which will inform the proposal and any subsequent plans moving forward.

➤ Facilities

Queries were raised in relation to the type of facilities that would be available from the new site, for example, childcare, wraparound services and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision. As part of the consultation process, the Council indicated an intention to utilise the identified site to provide the following facilities:

- ❖ Primary school facilities to accommodate both Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School
- ❖ Childcare
- ❖ Special Resource Base provision for each school, one with 8 places for Welsh medium and the other providing 8 places for English medium.
- ❖ Safe 'zoning' which can be utilised by the wider community.

It should once again be noted that there are no formal designs in place and how these can be delivered is still subject to review, based on stakeholder feedback.

➤ Site Orientation

A selection of consultees raised concerns regarding the layout and orientation of the school and how access to external amenities would be fairly distributed between both schools, in addition there were also comments regarding the potential for 2 individual school buildings on the site. Whilst no formal designs have been developed and as outlined above, the images used in the Consultation Document were conceptual artwork only at this stage, it is the intention of the Council to ensure that any development would ensure that both schools would benefit from not only an aesthetic and practical perspective but also from the benefits which providing a Net Zero build can bring to the environment and energy costings.

Impact on Welsh Language

➤ Welsh and English Schools (precedents)

Concerns were raised by consultees and noted during the Scrutiny Committee meeting regarding the perceived impact on the Welsh Language and the potential for dilution resulting from siting a Welsh Medium and English Medium School together. As outlined in the Consultation Document and associated Integrated Impact Assessment, consideration has been made to potential concerns where the Welsh speaking community may utilise English when they all come together.

- 1) It must be emphasised that both schools would remain independent entities and each school would occupy their own separate teaching areas within the new building. This will also extend to the outside space and both sets of pupils would have their own independent access points.
- 2) Any proposed shared use facilities are still subject to design, and the Council will work closely with both schools to develop a fit for purpose approach which delivers a facility that is functional for curriculum delivery and wider community use. For example, as a result of a delegation of School representatives, Members and Officers visiting Gabalfa Primary School and Ysgol Gymraeg Glan Ceubal in Cardiff, which is operating in a similar manner to that currently being proposed, the schools were clearly established and operating independently and there was no negative impact on the use of language in either school. It was acknowledged through discussions with both Head Teachers in Cardiff, that there were lessons to be learned from a layout perspective, for example how the shared reception point for visitors had two independent receptionists in operation, one for the Welsh Medium School and one for the English Medium School and this has been noted by Officers.
- 3) In addition to the reference site in Cardiff mentioned in the Consultation Document, there is already existing precedent within Caerphilly whereby Ysgol Bro Allta and Ystrad Mynach Primary, one being Welsh medium, the other English medium, successfully operate from a share site, as highlighted in the Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- 4) As identified as part of the Integrated Impact Assessment undertaken for the proposal, which was published as part of the Consultation pack, the Council intends to mitigate any negative impact on the Welsh Language as far as reasonably possible through utilising this site as an archetype in fully exploiting the opportunity to make Upper Rhymney Primary School and exemplar school whereby it will use the Welsh language more, via the Cymraeg i Blant scheme, engagement in Welsh for the Family course, potential twinning of the schools whereby cultures of the schools can be shared and the possibility of a Welsh Language mentoring scheme whereby Upper Rhymney Primary School Pupils are

mentored for Welsh lessons by their peers from Ysgol Y Lawnt. Consideration will also be given to setting targets in line with the Welsh Language Education: White Paper to enhance Welsh language provision in maintained schools that are not already designated Welsh-medium schools. Further discussions and support with both schools will be undertaken as the proposal progresses to investigate the options available to support this aspiration.

➤ Independent School Functions

Comments were received regarding the importance of establishing sufficient practical arrangements to enable each school to operate independently and in their language medium of choice. Once again, it must be emphasised that both schools would remain independent entities and each school would occupy their own separate teaching areas within the new building. This will also extend to the outside space and both sets of pupils would have their own independent access points.

The new building will incorporate both primary schools with associated facilities as well as childcare and separate Special Resource Base which provides provision for pupils with additional learning needs in each school, one with 8 places for Welsh medium and the other providing 8 places for English medium.

➤ Site Operations

Further to the comments received relating to independent school functions, observations were also received in relation to how a joint site would operate and the need for parity of decision making between both schools. Each school will retain their existing Head Teacher and Governing Body arrangements, however, a joint committee will be established consisting of representatives from both schools to establish terms and conditions about the working mechanisms relating to maintenance, access and general policies relating the site as a whole.

➤ Community Cohesion

Views were received relating to the impact on the Welsh Language through co-location and how this could be promoted in the wider community. As part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, a key Investment Objective is to optimise the use of infrastructure and resources, and to ensure flexibility of our assets so that space and facilities available for our stakeholders are maximised.

Whilst no final designs have been determined, there is a desire to encourage and facilitate community use of the asset in a safe, manageable way, which are intended to provide opportunities for pupils, families and the wider community for educational, recreational and leisure activities. Any design / configuration of shared communal facilities will ensure that any infringement on the Welsh Language as a result of these activities can be limited as required and therefore support each school to deliver activities either independently or concurrently if required and through each schools preferred language choice. It is anticipated that through both schools occupying the same site, it will also enable greater exposure and opportunity to utilise the Welsh Language through supporting the aspirations of the Welsh Language Education White Paper in relation to Upper Rhymney Primary School.

Subject to approval from Cabinet and Welsh Government to proceed, further engagement with relevant stakeholders will be undertaken to shape the new build and its facilities at the appropriate planning stage.

Funding

➤ School Funding Formula

A scrutiny member queried the funding arrangements for both schools. The Local Authority uses a funding formula to determine how much money should be allocated to each school. As part of this proposal, the current allocation to each school would not be changed as to do so requires Cabinet approval which falls outside of the scope of this consultation process.

In addition, as part of the consultation responses a query was raised with regards to any savings achieved as a result of the proposal. As the current proposal is centered around a shared use Net Zero Carbon building, each school would directly benefit from any savings on energy bills compared to their current sites as a result.

➤ Project Funding and Cost

To provide additional clarity around the funding mechanisms for the proposal. Subject to Cabinet approval, the proposal will be funded as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme. This is a jointly funded initiative between the Local Authority and Welsh Government. As with all schemes identified under this programme, there is a general intervention rate of 65% Welsh Government and 35% Local Authority, where exceptions do not apply. The estimated proposed project cost for the relocation of Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary, totals circa £17.6 million. Costings are based on Building Bulletin 98 and the Welsh Government 2024 Cost allowance. Subject to approval to proceed, further verification will need to be undertaken by the Council's Quantity Surveyor prior to submission of the final cost to Welsh Government. The Authority's contribution will be set aside from the Authority's Place Shaping reserve as agreed in principle by Cabinet during their meeting on the 28th June 2023, when they agreed to proceed to consultation.

Project Timelines

Both Estyn and Scrutiny queried the timeline for the process and the anticipated completion date.

➤ Process Timeline

Subject to approval at each stage, the process is outlined as follows:

Table 4: Process Timeline (subject to approval to progress at each stage)	
Consultation Ends	Thursday 9 th November 2023
Scrutiny (to consider Consultation Report & endorse publication of Statutory Notice)	Tuesday 28 th November 2023
Cabinet (to consider Consultation Report & agree publication of Statutory Notice)	Wednesday 13 th December 2023
Statutory Notice / Objection Period Opens	Monday 8 th January 2024
Statutory Notice / Objection Period End	Monday 5 th February 2024
Scrutiny (to consider Objection Report)	Tuesday 12 th March 2024
Cabinet (to make final determination)	Wednesday 20 th March 2024

Subject to final determination to proceed, the process would then be subject to the Planning Application and Sustainable Drainage approval process which is led by the Council's experienced Property Services Team.

In addition an Outline Business Case will be submitted to Welsh Government at the appropriate design/tender stage in line with their recently revised 3 stage Business Case process.

➤ **Proposed Occupation Date**

Subject to approval at each stage outlined above, the current anticipated occupation date is September 2027.

Reasonable Alternatives Identified

Following the consultation period, the Council is required to carry out a further assessment for the proposal. The purpose of this further assessment is to take account of any further information that has come forward through the consultation or otherwise.

As outlined in the Consultation Document, the proposal under consideration is to create a sustainable Net Zero Carbon school buildings with shared facilities, to accommodate Ysgol Y Lawnt, Upper Rhymney Primary School and Community use. This was the preferred option as identified through the options appraisal process and scored against the critical success factors of Strategic fit, Educational fit, Accessibility, Financial fit and Environmental impact.

Through the consultation process and the comments returned, the Council acknowledges suggestions relating to redeveloping the existing Ysgol Y Lawnt site; providing 2 separate buildings on the proposed site and also the potential to accommodate Upper Rhymney Primary School with another English Medium school on the new site, namely Bryn Awel Primary School and relocate Ysgol Y Lawnt to the vacant premises. It should be noted that all these suggestions were considered and discounted at Options appraisal stage. Therefore, no reasonable alternatives have been highlighted as a result of the Consultation Process.



NEXT STEPS

Recommendation

In reviewing the proposal to take account of further information that has come forward through the consultation and in consideration of the likely impact on quality and standards in education, the community and travelling arrangements, it is the recommendation of this report that the proposal is progressed as outlined in the Consultation Document, namely:

- **Relocation of Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School**

The proposal seeks to create a sustainable Net Zero Carbon school buildings with shared facilities, to accommodate Ysgol Y Lawnt, Upper Rhymney Primary School and Community use.

Decision Making

To deliver our reforms across the entire system, we will need a bold commitment to effective collaboration along with integration of services where appropriate. This will include Welsh

Government, the teaching profession and the wider education workforce, our key partners in local authorities, diocesan authorities, regional services, Estyn and others. Successful implementation of any proposal will require effective and honest engagement between all facets of the education system and our local communities and we are committed to providing the conditions to enable this to happen.

Cabinet Members are asked to:

- a) Consider the information contained in the Consultation Report
- b) Approve the recommendation, via vote, to proceed to Statutory Notice in relation to the proposal for Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhydney Primary School

Reporting, Notification and Publishing of Information

Should Cabinet decide to proceed with the proposal, a Statutory Notice will be published providing a 28 day notice period for objections. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 provides that anyone wishing to make objections to a school organisation proposal has the opportunity to do so. To be considered as statutory objections, objections must be made in writing and sent to the Council within the 28-day period.

Cabinet will then consider the outcome of the Statutory Notice at a future meeting and determine whether to implement the proposal having given due consideration to all the information provided.

In the event of objections, the Council will publish an objection report providing a summary of the objections and Cabinet's response to those objections within 7 days or the day of the determination of the proposal. This report will be available for all persons to view on the Council website and paper copies will be available on request.

Should Cabinet approve the proposal, a full Business Case will be submitted to the Welsh Minister for final approval and the works will commence.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Annex 1 :

[Consultation Notification Letter](#)

[Consultation Document](#)

[Integrated Impact Assessment](#)

Annex 2:

Estyn's Full Response

This report has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales.

Under the terms of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and its associated Code, proposers are required to send consultation documents to Estyn. However, Estyn is not a body which is required to act in accordance with the Code and the Act places no statutory requirements on Estyn in respect of school organisation matters. Therefore, as a body being consulted, Estyn will provide their opinion only on the overall merits of school organisation proposals. Estyn has considered the educational aspects of the proposal and has produced the following response to the information provided by the proposer.

The proposal is to carry out a regulated alteration to relocate Ysgol Y Lawnt and Upper Rhymney Primary School to a shared dual-purpose building on a new site.

The two schools will continue to provide Welsh and English medium primary education and remain as separate entities.

Summary/ Conclusion

Estyn considers that the proposal is likely to, at least, maintain the standard of education provision in the area.

Description and benefits

The local authority has set out a clear rationale for its proposal. It outlines simply the advantages of building a new joint facility while identifying the relatively poor condition rating of the two existing school buildings. Neither of the current school buildings is fully DDA compatible and the local authority identifies that both have a backlog of maintenance. However, neither school's buildings are at the lowest condition level and the proposal does not identify the scope or cost of necessary maintenance work.

The main school building of Ysgol Y Lawnt is Grade II Listed and subject to development restrictions. The site also has limited outdoor play areas. Upper Rhymney Primary is on two levels and currently has no lift. The proposal is to create a large, energy efficient building on a new site with modern classrooms, enhanced outdoor facilities and flexible spaces for shared and communal use.

While the local authority provides a clear description of the proposal and a projected timetable for statutory procedures, it does not provide a timetable for implementation of the proposals or for the transfer to the new site.

In the main, the proposer identifies clearly and fairly the expected benefits and disadvantages when compared with the status quo and how they will manage any risk. The local authority has provided a Welsh language Impact Assessment and a Community Impact Assessment as part of its proposal.

The local authority sets out four possible alternatives to its proposal. It provides suitable reasons for rejecting the option of building two new school buildings on the same site. However, it does not identify specifically why the possibility of developing either school independently on its existing site has been discounted, other than by stating the view that limitations on both sites make this alternative poor value for money and high risk.

The proposer has considered, in part, the impact of the changes on learner travel arrangements. It notes rightly that travel times for 'a minority' of pupils may change as a result of the proposed school's new location, but does not consider how many pupils, nor detail how the local authority will deal with this issue. The local authority does point out that it considers the difference in time taken to travel to the new school site will be negligible as it is in relatively close proximity to both existing schools.

The proposal projects a modest growth in pupil numbers at both schools over the next few years, with the need for around 193 Welsh medium pupil places and 157 English medium pupil places

by 2026. At the same time, the new build would cater for 525 pupils, plus a nursery and 16 special resource base places. The proposer does not explore the reason for surplus spaces thoroughly, other than identifying that a new innovative build may stimulate demand and that possible surplus places in the English medium provision could be managed sustainably by balancing the need to increase places in the Welsh medium school.

The proposal takes clear account of the impact of the proposals on Welsh medium provision within the local authority and the extent to which the proposal supports the targets in the local authority's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). The proposal to transfer Ysgol Y Lawnt to a new 21st century standard school building with an increased capacity will contribute to the authority's aim of increasing the number of pupils accessing Welsh medium education and expand the opportunities for pupils to pursue an education through the medium of Welsh. The proposal gives due consideration to the possible negative impact on pupil numbers in neighbouring Welsh medium schools. In mitigation, the local authority has outlined the possibility of minimising this through a managed and phased capacity increase of the new Welsh medium provision.

The proposal identifies that the local authority has set aside a reserve for capital costs as part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Band B Programme. The proposal does not provide an estimate for the cost of the new build or details of any potential savings.

Educational aspects of the proposal

The local authority does not give thorough consideration in its proposal to the impact of the changes on the quality and standards in education. For example, while it signposts the most recent inspection reports for both schools it does not identify directly whether the proposed change would assist the schools in addressing any of the identified recommendations.

The proposal does outline the benefit of the enhanced outdoor areas planned for the new site. For example, it highlights the provision of a MUGA with 3G surface and of a forest school and allotments for pupils' use. It assumes fairly that pupil attitudes and well-being would likely be impacted positively by the increased opportunity to engage in outdoor learning and physical play using these resources. The proposal also indicates that flexible use of the space may benefit pupils by enabling worthwhile opportunities for partnership working between the two schools and with community partners. For example, the proposal considers the potential positive impact on pupil, staff and community use of the Welsh language through the sharing of expertise between the two schools and common access to the bilingual reception area and communal facilities. However, the proposal does not give appropriate consideration to any potential adverse impacts arising from two schools sharing the same site, such as competition over the use of shared spaces or other limiting factors at an operational level that may compromise their independent function.

The proposal considers, in part, the impact on vulnerable groups, in particular those pupils with Special Educational Needs who are likely to benefit from the provision of two separate learning resources bases with eight pupil places in each language medium. In terms of accessibility, the new building will be fully accessible and compliant with the Equality's Act 2010.

The local authority rightly identifies that the proposed changes would result in some disruption and adjustment for pupils, staff and the wider community. The proposal seeks to maintain continuity for each of the schools by retaining the current leadership and governance arrangements for both schools and by engaging community partners in plans to transfer existing aspects of community use. Given that the proposal is to build on a new site, there should be no detrimental impact on the experience of pupils in either school during the construction phase.

Report prepared by:

Sustainable Communities for Learning Team
Directorate of Education and Corporate Services
Caerphilly County Borough Council
Penallta House
Tredomen Park
Ystrad Mynach
CF82 7PG

21stCenturySchools@caerphilly.gov.uk