Gwernyfed Community Council

Gwernyfed High School – Impact Assessment review

January 2016

In the light of Powys County Councils far-reaching review of high school provision at the Gwernyfed campus, Gwernyfed Community Council (hereafter GCC) has conducted an initial review of the impact of the most radical of the available outcomes- i.e. the closure of the entire Gwernyfed site.

Methodology

In this review, GCC has chosen not to address the issue of popular opinion concerning GHS. For the record, GCC is unequivocally clear that the vast majority of residents in the community wholeheartedly support the continued existence of GHS. However we acknowledge that this is not the forum for this opinion.

Similarly, we do not see it as our position to contend the academic merits or otherwise of the various proposals. (Once again, however, it may be noted that the widespread belief in the community is that diversion of children away from GHS to a larger facility in Brecon would be inevitably deleterious to their education.)

Rather we sought to discover (albeit at a rather superficial level, given the restrains of time and resources) what would be some of the wider impacts on the community. In particularly we focussed on the business sector. These repercussions may be regarded as secondary; however we feel that it is entirely legitimate to examine the overall status of the community and to reflect on the ways in which a community may be affected by educational policy.

Context.

The Glasbury/Gwernyfed district is facing a contracting employment situation. In the last few months we have seen the closure of Glasbury House Outdoor Education Centre – a significant employer. The future of Woodlands Outdoor Education Centre, we hear, remains in doubt. Despite a number of thriving businesses in the area, GHS remains the single most significant employer.

Business outcomes

We asked a variety of local businesses to reflect on the impact of GHS closure on their business

1. Mill Service Station Three Cocks

The proprietor, Mr Peter Lewis has provided a written account of his expected losses from closure of GHS. (His report attached herewith.) They include significant loss of sales from the shop, loss of fuel sales to parents, and loss of trade in servicing and repairs. GCC is particularly mindful of the key role the Mill Service Station plays for residents of Three Cocks and the Gwernyfed Estate. If the viability of the Mill Service Station were to fail, then the community would be left with no shop and no nearby access to basic family supplies (e.g. nappies).

1. Glasbury Car Repairs

The proprietor, Mr Warren Slater, conducts a significant proportion of his business on the vehicles of staff and the families of pupils at GHS. Although he was not immediately in a position to accurately predict his level of losses in the event of the closure of GHS, it does represent a serious business challenge and could lead to the contraction of the business and the loss of employment opportunities.084

Farming outcomes

The farming community is in many respect uniquely dependant on GHS. GCC has not has the time or resources to contact many farms, but were able to conduct an extensive interview with two local farms known to have children of school age.

1. Mr D Havard, Little Lodge Farm, Glasbury

This is a family-run farm. Both of the sons in the family attended GHS – one still does. It has been the practice of both sons to return from school by 3.15pm, and to immediately begin work on the farm. According to the season, they may work for up to three hours – or possibly more during key times such as lambing. A delay of up to an hour in arriving home would represent a significant burden on the function of the farm. Furthermore, given that the sons are firmly focused on land-based careers, this would actually dilute their work-experience and on-the-job learning.

1. Mrs Tracy Evans, Upper Cwmcadarn Farm, Felindre

Two sons are both enthusiastic farm workers – although the younger is not due to start at GHS until autumn 2016! Both boys are set on lives in farming. Their contribution to the farm is significant, and they view this experience as a crucial part of their growth and development. The elder son also gives extensive help on his grandfather’s farm. They see the possible closure of GHS as deeply injurious to the farm business in both the short-term and the long term, and injurious to the traditions and culture of farming.

Although these reports relate to just two farming families, we have reason to believe that they are in many ways typical of the traditional farming sector in this area.

Pre-school / early years impact

Since there is no pre-school or primary school provision within Gwernyfed, we have been forced to look further afield for an analysis of the effects of GHS closure on this key sector.

1. Mrs Hayley Manns, Busy Bees Nursery and pre-school, Clifford

Although situated “over the border” in Herefordshire, 90% or more of Busy Bees’ pupils come from within Powys – both from Hay-on-Wye and the neighbouring villages such as Clyro, Felindre, Llanigon and Boughrood. Mrs Mann has noted an upturn in entries from families in Powys, and is clear that a major motivator in many cases is to establish a place at Clifford Primary School, with the prospect of proceeding thereafter to Fairfield High School. She was also able to reference at least one family who have explicitly opted to buy a house in the Peterchurch rather than in the Gwernyfed area, based on an expectation of GHS closing!

Church community impacts

1. The Rev. David Thomas, Church of St Peter & St Cynidr, Glasbury

Rev. Thomas conducted a number of conversations within his congregation to try to discover what the effects of GHS closure may be. Beyond a predictably high level of affection and support for GHS, what he discovered was a great and widely held certainty that the most profound effects of closure will be long-term and demographic. Without a school – and a good one – within the area, it is believed that the area will more than ever fail to attract and retain young families. Parishioners fear that the area will become a “retirement zone”, with all young families and a great many of the younger working-age population forced out.

Gwernyfed Community Council is clearly not in a position to provide an academic exposition of this phenomenon, although anecdotally it is not hard to find examples of areas that have experienced it (and it is implied within the evidence provided by Busy Bees Pre-School).

As a result, GCC believes that the decision over that future of GHS cannot be viewed simply as determining the educational pattern for local children, but could also profoundly re-imagine and re-cast the entire nature of the community. With this in mind, GCC is bound to reflect the dominant view of the local population in vehemently opposing the closure of Gwernyfed High School.

Andrew Jones

Chairman, Gwernyfed Community Council