Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Community Impact Assessment

Amalgamation of Melin Infant and Melin Junior Schools.

1. Context

In preparing statutory proposals involving a school a Local Authority is required to assess the impact that the proposals may have on local families and the local community through the preparation of a Community Impact Assessment (CIA).

The Community Impact Assessment has been conducted in line with the guidance set out in Welsh Government’s Circular No: 006/2013: ‘School Organisation Code’.

2. The Assessment Process

The Community Impact Assessment has been informed by:-

- A review of existing school/community interaction
- Evidence from earlier school consultation events
- A composite audit of community facilities
- Dialogue with partner Organisations to better understand current gaps in provision and their work in the community.
- Desktop study of secondary data
- A Scoping Study embracing the Ward of Neath East

Interviews have been held with the Acting Head teachers, school Clerks, Governors and Council Elected Members associated with each of the schools concerned. The findings from the interviews have been used to interpret the extent, type, frequency and duration of community activity on each of the school sites.

3. The proposal

It is proposed to establish a primary school to replace Melin Infant and Melin Junior schools. The primary school will serve the catchment area of the existing Infant and Junior schools. It will
utilise existing school buildings on the Infant and Junior school, which are some 0.5 km apart.

Subject to the outcome of consultation and subsequent Member approval, the primary school will open on the 1st September 2016, with the Infant and Junior schools closing on the 31st August 2016.

4. **The Schools**

The two schools under review are located within the Melincryddan and Pencerau areas of the Neath East Ward. Neath East is largely an industrialised and residential area with woodland (Eaglesbush Valley) to the east.

The Melin Infant school is an English medium, community school providing education for pupils aged 3 – 7 years. The school occupies a single site laid out as hard surfaced area playground with modest landscaping. As at January 2015, the school had 91 full-time pupils on roll and 43 part-time (nursery) pupils. Virtually all pupils transfer to Melin Junior school.

The Melin Junior school is an English medium, community school providing education for pupils aged 7-11. As at January 2015 the school had 120 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils attending the school are from the immediate Neath East catchment where there are small pockets of severe deprivation.

5. **The degree to which the school buildings are used now as a community resource**

In Melin Infant school the pupils enjoy a range of school based extra curricular activity and after school Clubs. The school offers a varied and inclusive programme of extra curricular sport, outdoor learning (Forest School), computer studies, cooking and a popular Choir. The school also host its own Breakfast Club and the ‘Flying Start’ initiative.

In Melin Junior school the pupils enjoy extra curricular activity and after school Clubs that feature an extensive range of sport, Drama, Art and ICT. There is also lunchtime Homework Club.

Due to the lack of suitable accommodation and outdoor facilities at each of the school sites under review (predominantly hard standing) there is little in the way of community use. The school
buildings and on site facilities are not widely used by the community as opportunities are limiting. There are good links with Melin Infant school and the local Gardening Club who supply plants for the children. The Infant school makes good use of Eaglesbush Valley and the woodland immediately adjacent to the school to promote a well attended ‘Forest School’ initiative.

6. **Extent of community facilities within easy reach of the existing schools**

The area surrounding the Melin Infant and the Melin Junior schools is heavily urbanised and boasts many amenities including retail shops, Churches and Chapels, Senior Citizens Welfare Hall, a Boys & Girls Club, a playing field, two equipped play areas, open spaces and wooded areas. The Ward of Neath East is well served by public transport, has good access to the A465 and many community facilities are on easy walking routes.

The community facilities within easy reach of the schools include:-

- **The Neath Town Council managed Melin Community Centre** which hosts a range of community activity including Modern Sequence Dancing, Boxing, Martial Arts, Weight Watchers and Keep Fit/Zumba. The Centre provides a venue for the ‘Flying Start’ initiative, NPT Stroke group and a pensioners Group.

- **The Neath Boys & Girls Club** which provides a Youth Club setting for under 14 year olds. Activities include football, indoor sports, computer game lounge and tuck shop.

- **Various Churches and Chapels** including St. Catherine’s (which is the venue for school concerts), the Church Hall (which hosts ‘Georgie Porgie’s’ Play Group and is the Emergency evacuation centre for the school), Ebenezer Baptist Church, Elim Pentecostal, Neath Methodist Church and New Maria Congregational Church.

- **Parks and Open Spaces** including the playing field, equipped play area and allotments at Evans Road Recreation Ground, fixed play equipment at Bowen Street and countryside walks within Eaglesbush Valley.
• Sport and Arts venues including the Neath Afan Gymnastics Club and Theatr na nÓg in Milland Road Industrial Estate and the Melin and Neath Amateur Operatic Society at Dan y Graig and Bowen Street, Melin.

• The Payne Street Digi Lab managed by the Melin Community Conference and the Neath Communities First Cluster Manager.

The proposal to amalgamate the aforementioned schools can be seen as an opportunity, with funding, to further enhance the local community provision by growing the type and extent of community based activity on a school site. Interviews with the Head and senior management have revealed a willingness to embrace this concept.

7. Adverse impact of school amalgamation upon the community

The after school Clubs and the rich menu of extra curricular activity currently provided at Melin Infant and Melin Junior schools is to be preserved under amalgamation.

In amalgamation it is important to preserve and enhance the onsite school facilities if the pupils and the community are to enjoy continued benefit. The amalgamation of Melin Infant and Melin Junior schools and the development of a new management regime is an opportunity to devise a model for enhanced community use and an enriched programme of extended school use.

There will be no adverse affect upon community activity at the schools that form part of this appraisal following amalgamation.

8. Plans to mitigate impact if community provision is lost from the schools

No mitigation Plan has been prepared as there is no community provision being lost.

9. Opportunities for enhancing existing school and community facilities to receive additional Out of School Hours activity.

Under the proposal to amalgamate Melin Infant and Melin Junior schools, opportunities exist to enhance school based and
community based activities and facilities. The amalgamation is also seen as an opportunity to enhance transition between the two schools.

The school Headship has plans to strengthen the existing links with the Communities First Cluster, ‘Flying Start’ housed in the demountable, the Melin Walkers Club, the May Day in Melincryddan celebrations, Keep Wales Tidy, the annual Christmas Light Switch On and the monthly visits made by the vicar in order to conduct school assemblies.

Links are to be forged with the Swansea City F.C. and Communities First under the ‘Healthy Together’ programme.

There is a willingness within both schools to use the amalgamation process to work together, to further develop community use and interaction with a wider audience. The After school Clubs and the links with Ebenezer Baptist Church will be strengthened as a result of combined Services being held and the prospect of joint initiatives involving parents from both schools. ‘Forest School’ will also in the future involve the Junior school as part of the Primary School arrangements.

The above initiatives could, in part, be supported by match funding the Pupil Derivation Grant with Communities First funding (the majority of those children attending the Melin Infant and Melin Junior schools are from the Neath Communities First Cluster area).

Generally, opportunities also exist to provide new, additional and improved community amenities for the Neath Town Council, the Churches/Chapels and the voluntary sector that serve the Neath East area. This can be achieved by attracting external sources of grant aid, and by making better use of existing facilities to receive additional out of school hour’s activity. The Neath East area would qualify for certain extra voluntary grant aid in the form of the Big Lottery Fund ‘Awards for All Wales’ Programme and the WREN Landfill Tax Credit Scheme.

10. Conclusion

The Community Impact Assessment recognises the importance of both Melin Infant school and Melin Junior School in providing a venue for school based events and extra curricular activity.
Following evaluation, it has been shown that under this proposal it is essential that existing community/school interaction to be retained, preserved and enhanced as appropriate with no loss of amenity to the wider community. Community provision will not be lost from the school in its amalgamation and hence there are no plans to mitigate the loss. The existing community use of both of the school sites needs to be further developed. There is a welcome and general acceptance of the amalgamation proposal within the community of Neath East. All existing school/community facilities and activities are to be retained as part of the proposal to amalgamate. There is no adverse effect upon community provision if the Infant school and the Junior school were to amalgamate.

**Sources/References:-**

(1)Interviews:-
- Acting Head and the Clerk of Melin Infant school (25.09.15)
- Acting Head and the Clerk of Melin Junior school (21.09.15)
- Chair of Governors Melin Infant and Junior schools (22.09.15)
- County Councillors for the Ward of Neath East (22.09.15)
- Clerk to the Neath Town Council (17.09.15)
- Manager of the Neath Communities First Cluster (15.09.15)
- Voluntary Sector providers including the Chairman of the Neath Boys & Girls Club (15.09.15)

(2)NPTCBC Local Development Plan (September 2011) identifying all community provision within the spatial areas.

(3)Audit of Town Council provision in Neath East.

(4)NPTCBC Neighbourhood Profile for Neath East.


(6)Scoping Study (29.09.15)