

**Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council  
Community Impact Assessment**

**The Upper Afan Valley – with a specific focus on Cymer  
Comprehensive School**

**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 <sup>1</sup>
- Evidence from earlier school consultation events
- A composite audit of community facilities <sup>2</sup>
- Dialogue with partner Organisations to better understand current gaps in provision and their work in the community.
- Desktop study of secondary data <sup>3,4</sup>
- A Scoping Study embracing the Electoral Wards of Cymmer, Glyncoerrwg and Gwynfi.
- A Mapping exercise extending across the whole of the Upper Afan Valley.

Interviews have been held with the Head teacher, Deputy Head, the school Business Manager, Governors and Council Elected Members associated with the Comprehensive school and the four feeder Primary schools. The findings from the interviews have been used to interpret the extent, type, frequency and duration of community activity within the Federation.

### 3. **The proposal**

The Council is proposing to make arrangements for the pupils who would otherwise attend Cymer Afan Comprehensive school to receive their secondary education at *Ysgol Newydd Margam*, a £30m new build investment by the Council offering English – medium provision in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century school setting.

Subject to the outcome of consultation and subsequent Member approval, *Ysgol Newydd Margam* will receive pupils from the upper Afan Valley on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019, with Cymer Afan Comprehensive School closing on the 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019.

### 4. **The School**

The school under review is centrally located within the upper Afan Valley. The Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is situated in the Cymmer Ward which comprises the villages of Cynonville, Dyffryn Rhondda, Cymmer and Croeserw.

The Afan Valley Wards have a rich history of coal mining. The streamlining of the coal industry has brought local unemployment and socio – economic deprivation. The reclaimed landscape is now one of largely rolling hills, grassland and forestry with wind turbines that regularly puncture the horizon. Local amenities are within easy walking distance.

The population of the Ward of Cymmer is 1,743. The two adjoining Wards of Glyncoirwg and Gwynfi have a population of 1,096 & 1,362 respectively. Collectively the population of the upper Afan Valley is 4,201.

Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is an English medium, community school providing education for pupils aged 11-16 years. Since September 2013 it has been part of a five school federation in the upper Afan Valley. Schools within the federation maintain their own delegated budgets and identity but are able to explore the advantages of sharing resources such as facilities, IT, staff, school buildings, etc.

The school occupies a single site with direct management responsibilities for a sports hall and a floodlit Artificial Turf Pitch at the Cymer Afan Primary school site. The Comprehensive school

has a terraced hard surfaced play yard with little in the way of biodiversity or natural greenery. A former swimming pool within the school has been in-filled to create a Fitness Suite for community use. There is a dedicated Youth Wing within one of the teaching blocks. The only green open space that the Comprehensive school can boast is that of the Red Field which sits in an elevated position on a hilltop above the school. This is maintained from the school budget and is the principle sports field for curricular PE.

As at October 2017 the school had 226 pupils on roll. The majority of pupils attending the school are from the immediate catchment of Cymmer, Glyncoed and Gwynfi. All three Wards have acute levels of deprivation – the Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) of Cymmer 1 is ranked 446 in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) {where 1 is most deprived and 1,909 is the least}. The LSOA of Cymmer 2 is ranked 25; Glyncoed is 168 and Gwynfi 193. The degree of carlessness in Cymmer is 41.9%.

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

Cymer Afan Comprehensive school can boast a number of on-site community facilities. These facilities have been developed over the years by prudent investment of external grant aid sourced from local Wind Farms, Communities First funding and successful bids made to the Big Lottery Fund.

The school houses the Fitness Suite which is managed by ‘Afan Community Fitness’ volunteers. The Suite is a fully equipped gym comprising spin bikes, Steppers, treadmills, single station exercise equipment and free weights. The facility is open to the public on a week day evening between 4.00 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. and on a Saturday and Sunday between 9.00 a.m. and 12 noon. There are over 100 paid up members paying £15 a month. The gym offers Spinning classes and Boot Camp and operates a ‘Gym Buddy’ system for those that are new to exercise. The operating expenditure associated with managing the Fitness Suite is shared between the school and the volunteers.

There is a dedicated and long established Youth Wing within the school. A Youth Club is provided on a Tuesday and Friday evening. The average attendance per night at the Youth Club in

2016/17 was 7 attendees (total contacts 380 involving 48 individuals aged 11 – 25 years). Activities are demand-led and include arts & crafts, sport, games consoles, pool and table tennis, hair dressing, board games and advice upon smoking cessation, bullying, alcohol and good citizenship.

The school has entered into an agreement with the Croeserw F.C in the management and upkeep of the Red Field which is the school's principle outdoor playing surface. The field receives limited community use.

The school manages both the Sports Hall and the floodlit Artificial Turf Pitch (ATP) situated at the Cymer Afan Primary School site. Both the indoor and the outdoor facility operate at a 25% capacity utilisation between the community hours of 5.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. Users include Cwmavon RFC Minis and Juniors, Croeserw Juniors F.C, Nantfyllon RFC, Caerau Whites F.C and 5 x 60 Street Games. The Sports Hall and the ATP lend themselves to occasional Birthday parties and the S.H.E.P. Programme for school Year Groups 5, 6 & 7. The Local Authority provides financial assistance to the school as a means of deflecting the on cost associated with staffing these facilities.

The school has generous meeting space which is used by Social Services, WCADA, the Job Centre (and 'Tai Tarian' recruitment) and for public meetings. Because of its central location 'Slimming World' use the school for their weekly meeting which is very popular attracting 80 weight watchers (the 'Slimming World' Club find the cost of hiring the Croeserw C.E.C. too prohibitive).

For completeness a review has been undertaken of the extent of community use of the federated Primary schools. This is very modest with extra-curricular netball in Pen Afan, Playgroup (Monday to Friday 9.15 a.m. to 11.45 a.m.) and Afan Tots (Wednesday 1.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m.) in Cymer Afan Primary school.

The Cymer Afan Comprehensive School is the receiving centre for the federated Primary schools. The Headship reports good cross phase working and sharing of resources within the extended school day. This in turn strengthens the transition for the children.

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

The number and type of community facilities within the Ward of Cymmer are both many and varied. The Mapping exercise has revealed a rich mix of amenities within easy walking distance and this is augmented with still further facilities in the adjoining village of Croeserw, less than one mile walking distance from the school. Further afield (2.5 miles) the villages of Glyncoerrwg to the North and Gwynfi to the East also boast amenities that promote sport, health and community interaction (please refer to A1 Mapping exercise).

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

- The Afan Valley Swimming Pool – now managed by ‘Afan Valley Community Leisure’ through ‘Llandarcy Park Ltd’/NPT College. In receipt of grants from the Fynnon Oer and Lynfi/Afan Wind Farms. Also a grant from the Big Lottery Fund (£344,000) to sustain operating costs over the next five years. Main income generated by public swimming lessons and classes. Also 30 pupils from the Comprehensive school enjoy 4 to 7 week block of tuition as part of the KS3 GCSE PE curriculum. Management intend to augment the pool with a Steam Room and a Jacuzzi and there are further proposals for developing the area currently laid out as a Learner pool.
- Community Library /Tea Room (next to Health Centre and the equipped play area). Hosts a range of community based and Out of School activities including Cinema screenings, Tai Chi, Yoga, ‘Needle & Yarn’, Book Club and Art project.
- The Methodist Church and the Gilgal Community Church. The former hosting a charity shop and the latter a Food Bank.
- The Cymmer bowling green. The Club is trying to develop its junior section.
- The Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre (C.E.C.) which has a rich and varied mix of community and educational based activities. The Centre houses ‘Little Wings Playgroup’, a Youth Club with an average attendance per night in 2016/17 of 15

(total contacts 383 involving 67 individuals aged 11- 25), the Jobs Fair, the Me, Myself & I Friendship Club, the 'Hype Club' (OSH Activity Club for ALN), Adult Disability Fresh Start, the Crochet Club and a range of 'Community for Work' initiatives which lead to placements. The Centre has a Construction and Hairdressing suite, the Afan Village Café, conference/meeting rooms and an Artificial Turf Pitch. There are good education links with NPT College and young people study IT, GCSE English Language, English Literature, Maths and Childcare.

- Tudor Park – home to Croeserw F.C Seniors & Juniors, the Bowls Club, an equipped play area and the Social Club.

Further afield in Glyncorrwg there is the:-

- Noddfa Community Centre, now operated by a voluntary Halls Management Committee. The Centre offers a blend of activities of appeal to a wide audience. The facility hosts Flying Start, has a Youth Club, W.I .coffee mornings and bingo, 50+ Club with 'NPT Age Connects', Craft and Welsh Classes, Job Club and a range of charitable fundraising activities. There are over 100 paid up Members.
- Ynysgorrwg Park – home to Glyngorrwg RFC and the recently re- established Glyncorrwg F.C. The site has an indoor barn, an equipped play area, a floodlit synthetic ERDC Field Turf pitch, a defunct bowling green and a football and rugby pitch. The Glyncorrwg RFC Clubhouse is the meeting place for local voluntary groups including the Glyncorrwg Ladies Choir.
- Glyngorrwg Ponds and Mountain Bike Visitor Centre (adjacent to the Business Development Centre and the Units that house Small and Medium sized Enterprise). This venue is world renowned for its mountain bike trails and is popular with anglers and walkers alike. The Centre hosts the 'Corrwg Cwtch' café and is a Dark Sky Discovery site for astronomy.

In the East there is the:-

- Gwynfi Miners Community Hall, again operated by a Halls Management Committee assisted by grants from the local Wind Farms. The Hall opens Monday to Friday 2.00 p.m. -8.00 p.m. with extended hours on a Thursday. There is a very popular

Youth Club operating between 5.45 p.m. and 7.45 p.m. on a Wednesday with an average attendance per night in 2016/17 of 27 (total contacts 812 involving 98 individuals aged 11-25). Activities within the Youth Club setting include issues around physical and emotional health & well-being, WCADA talks, Homework Club, arts & crafts classes, dodgeball, etc. The Hall also hosts cinema screenings, Job Club, the Brass Band, Zumba, Circuits, boxercise and Boot Camp and has started an Under 8's football class. The facilities within the Hall include a fully equipped Boxing gym, a library with internet access and a public Fitness Suite.

- Floodlit Multi Use Games Area at Pen Afan Primary school – no longer used by the Gwynfi United F.C , PCSO and Youth Services as issues with Caretaking responsibilities in the extended school day.
- Gwynfi bowling green. The Club is developing its junior section.
- Various equipped play areas including Margaret Terrace which is proposed for enhancement.

It can be seen from the above that the area under review is well served by community facilities. There will be some impact upon the Afan Valley Swimming Pool and the Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre through depleted attendance associated with visits which would otherwise have been made by pupils of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School, should the proposal to close the Comprehensive school be pursued.

## **7. Adverse impact of school closure upon the community**

The current extensive range of community facilities and activities based on the school site would be lost if the school was to close on a permanent basis. All existing extended community use of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School would need to transfer to an alternative location under this proposal. It is important to preserve and enhance the onsite extended school provision if it were to be displaced and if the community is to enjoy continued benefit.

The facilities that are at particular risk include the fully equipped Fitness Suite, the dedicated Youth Wing, the Red Field, the

centrally located meeting spaces and the future management of the Sports Hall and the floodlit Artificial Turf Pitch , possibly under a new federated management arrangement. Cymer Afan Comprehensive schoolchildren transferring to *Ysgol Newydd Margam* would enjoy state of the art facilities that are planned for in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century school campus. This would grow the academic and sporting reputation of these pupils.

Anecdotal evidence from consultees points to concern with regard to:-

- The community losing its focus
- ‘Education’ being the biggest employer in the valley
- Deprivation becoming worse as a result of out- migration and the valley being less attractive for young families to move into
- The future of the remaining four Primary schools being suspect as a new Federation may not be in a position to share staff, IT, buildings, SENCO Coordinator, etc. to the same extent
- The progress and the improved academic achievements made by Cymer Afan Comprehensive schoolchildren under the present arrangements being curtailed or stifled
- Losing the hub of the community where people feel safe, gain advice and are signposted or referred onto other Services.

#### **8. Plans to mitigate impact if community provision is lost from the school**

Investigations have been carried out to explore possible alternatives for displaced community provision, that which could otherwise be lost as a result of school closure.

An Options Appraisal could be developed which would involve:-

- Negotiations with ‘Llandarcy Park Ltd’ and the ‘NPTC Group’ to relocate the school Fitness Suite to the Afan Valley Swimming Pool. This would involve infilling the Learner Pool to create a separate gym facility which would augment the current pool usage, the recently installed sauna and the Jacuzzi that is being planned for. Initial concept plans have been drawn up following the UAV Sports



Facilities Feasibility Study completed by ‘Community Design Gwent’ in May 2009.

- Displacing the Youth Club that is staged on a Tuesday and Friday to the Cymer Afan Primary school Sports Hall. This has the capacity to accommodate the 48 individuals that make use of the Service in 2016/17.
- Transferring management of the Red Field to the Croeserw F.C. If this proved to be uneconomic in the short to medium term the playing field would revert back to nature with the Football Club then concentrating its fixtures on Tudor Field.
- Making new management arrangements for the Cymer Afan Primary School Sports Hall and floodlit Artificial Turf Pitch. Consultees felt there was insufficient administrative support within the Primary schools to undertake this function in the absence of the Comprehensive School and a Business Manager. Initial discussions have been held between ‘Llandarcy Park Ltd’ and the Local Authority with regard to managing the Sports Hall and the Artificial Turf Pitch at arm’s length from the Afan Valley Swimming Pool. This will need to be further explored.
- Displacing community hires such as ‘Slimming World’ to an alternative location such as the Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre.
- Renewing the management capacity of the four remaining federated Primary schools to ensure the continued benefit of shared Leadership, staffing, buildings, IT, facilities and experience is enjoyed.

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

Under the proposal to close Cymer Afan Comprehensive School opportunities exist to enhance the remaining school based and community based activities and facilities.

The Wards of Cymmer, Glyncorrwg and Gwynfi are uniquely placed to benefit from a variety of extra voluntary contributions made available via the Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm, the Ffynnon Oer Wind Farm and the Llynfi Afan Wind Farm.

The Community amenities and activities provided by the voluntary sector that serve the upper Afan Valley area can benefit from the above sources of grant aid. The existing amenities provided by the

Third Sector can be adapted, modernised and enriched by this grant aid in such a way as to receive additional out of school hour's activity. Many of the aforementioned community amenities, including the Afan Valley Swimming Pool, the Glyncorrwg Ponds Co-operative, the Noddfa Community Centre, the Gwynfi Miners Community Hall and the Gwynfi Bowls Club have already taken the initiative and have secured funding from the Wind Farm Community Benefit Funds.

The area also continues to qualify for Big Lottery Funding (as evidenced by the £344,000 contribution made to the running costs of the Afan Valley Swimming Pool) and is deemed sufficiently rural to benefit from the Rural Communities Development Fund (RCDF) and the Leader Fund which is a Welsh Government investment programme intended to combat poverty by promoting growth, economic prosperity and well-being.

## 10. **Conclusion**

The Community Impact Assessment recognises the importance of the Cymer Afan Comprehensive School and the part it plays in the wider community. Community provision and activities that have been developed over an extended period on the school site will be displaced under this proposal. Following evaluation, it has been shown that it is essential that community/school interaction is protected and not lost. There are opportunities to relocate community based activity from the school to alternative locations. These locations can be enhanced as appropriate with no loss of amenity to the wider community. It is recommended that plans are put in place to mitigate any loss.

Under this proposal the pupils who would otherwise attend Cymer Afan Comprehensive school are to receive secondary education at *Ysgol Newydd Margam*, an English – medium provision in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century school setting. The process of completing the Community Impact Assessment has helped to engender a better understanding of how best to mitigate the impact of school reorganisation on a community, which is right and proper. The deciding factor in determining the school organisation proposal should be one of securing the best educational offer for pupils.

## Sources/References:-

### (1)Interviews:-

- Head, Deputy Head, Business Manager , Chair and Vice Chair of Governors of the federated schools (16.11.17)
- County Councillors for the Wards of Cymmer, Glyncorrwg and Gwynfi (20.11.17 )
- Management of the Croeserw Community Enterprise Centre (15.11.17)
- Former Communities First staff of the ‘Upper Afan Forum Ltd’ now working to NSA Afan (27.11.17)
- Manager of the Afan Valley Swimming Pool/ ‘Llandarcy Park Ltd’ (16.11.17)
- Senior Youth and Community Officer, NPTCBC (17.11.17)
- Management of the Gwynfi Miners Community Hall (21.11.17)
- Caretaker of the Noddfa Community Centre, Glyncorrwg (21.11.17)
- Manager of the Glyncorrwg Ponds Co-operative and Visitor Centre (21.11.17).

(2)NPTCBC Local Development Plan (September 2011) identifying all community provision within the spatial area. Also RDP and ‘Towards a Valley Strategy’ visionary report.

(3)Audit of community provision in the Wards of Cymmer, Glyncorrwg and Gwynfi.

(4)Census data (2011) and NPTCBC Neighbourhood Profile for the Wards of Cymmer, Glyncorrwg and Gwynfi. Communities First - Upper Afan Valley Action Plan.

(5)Welsh Government School Organisation Code: Circular No: 006/2013

(6)Upper Afan Valley Sports Facilities Study- ‘Community Design Gwent’ May 2009

(7)Scoping Study (16.11.17 & 21.11.17)

