

Crewkerne & Ilminster Area Review Response to Consultation

Background

A consultation took place between Thursday 12 November and Friday 11 December 2020. During that time, 379 responses were submitted. Analysis of responses can be found in the [Consultation Outcomes Document](#)

The main themes arising from the consultation responses received were as follows:

1. Accountability
2. Consultation process
3. Admissions and pupil modelling
4. Finance
5. Alternatives to the proposal
6. Implementation
7. Quality of education
8. School staff
9. Travel, transport and environmental impacts
10. Misterton First School

1. Accountability

Is change really necessary?

Pupil numbers in the area have been declining for many years. While it is possible to operate a successful three-tier system, this depends on having sufficient pupil numbers to make the system financially viable. In Somerset, both Frome College and Kings of Wessex are financially viable upper schools, however, both of these schools have over 1000 pupils on roll each year, compared to fewer than 500 at Wadham. In Crewkerne and Ilminster, the small size of the system is making it financially unsustainable. If no action is taken, then the financial pressures could have a highly detrimental effect on the quality of education that schools can offer.

Would there be someone to hold accountable if this isn't successful? What if the trust chose not to cooperate?

The decision to review school organisation sits with the County Council, because it has a legal duty to secure efficient and effective education in the area. This means that Somerset County Council would be accountable for any decision to reorganise. Somerset County Council does not hold legal powers to execute every aspect of the current proposal (specifically the council does not have powers to make structural changes to Maiden Beech as it is an academy) and therefore there is an element of risk that other stakeholders might not cooperate in implementing proposals, if the decision was taken to do so. However, the County Council has been working cooperatively with the office of the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Diocese, Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust and the Baths and Wells Multi-Academy Trust and to date all stakeholders, whether in agreement with the substance of the proposals or not, have remained committed to playing their part in any future changes for the good of children and the area.

2. Consultation process

Is the pandemic an insurmountable obstacle to consultation?

The issues arising from declining pupil numbers have been evident for at least ten years. Action to consider how the issues might be addressed started five years ago, and a preliminary consultation was held in 2019. The current consultation was due to be launched before the pandemic but was delayed by legal action triggered by a decision made by the Regional Schools Commissioner, because of the limitations the decision would have placed on the County Council's ability to meet its statutory obligations by changing structures within the area. Every year that goes by without a resolution increases the risk that standards will be significantly adversely affected.

While we would not have actively chosen to consult during the pandemic, schools and workplaces are still operational. Somerset residents will be aware that the government's decision-making process relating to local government reorganisation is underway at this time and has not been put back because of the pandemic. This is a decision which will affect the whole county and a significantly greater number of employees. Equally, national government continues negotiations on Brexit with the EU and there has been no delay due to the pandemic, though all countries are affected.

We know that the impact of the pandemic may well be ongoing pressure on public finances. This makes it even more important that schools in Somerset go forward in the strongest possible position so that children's education is not put at risk.

On balance, the timing is not an issue that should impede the decision to progress at this time.

Was the consultation period long enough?

The consultation process began in 2019. During the summer of 2019 a range of options were published on the council website for six weeks alongside face to face consultation activity in local schools. Starting in September 2020, informal engagement on a single model started with school leaders and senior stakeholders. The proposal was shared informally with parents, staff and governors in affected schools during the week commencing 5 October 2020. The Cabinet made the decision to consult on 21 October and a formal consultation was launched online and in the press on 12 November. Feedback has been received through the online consultation form, during virtual engagement sessions, by post and in letters sent to County Council staff, elected members and the local MP. All representations have been taken into account, including all those submitted in advance of the launch of the formal consultation. The period from 5 October to 11 December is ten weeks. There was a previously a six-week consultation period in 2019. If a decision to proceed to the publication of statutory notices is taken, this will involve a further four-week consultation period.

In total, this would be twenty weeks of consultation activity on this matter before any decision to proceed might take place. What is required by statute is four weeks, and the government standard expects at most sixteen weeks.

Does holding events online disenfranchise vulnerable people?

We wanted to ensure that as many people as possible were provided with the opportunity to have their say. Before and during the consultation period, we encouraged anyone with a view about the proposals to share their perspective with us by taking part in our series of Microsoft Teams Live events, completing an online

questionnaire or by emailing or writing to us. In addition to publishing the details online through the Somerset County Council's website and social media accounts, we distributed a series of news releases and this information was published by the local media.

We have not as yet been made aware of any individuals who faced specific barriers to engagement with the consultation.

If a decision is taken to progress with statutory consultation, this would be an opportunity to engage directly with people whose voices may not have been heard through the first and second consultation periods.

3. Admissions and pupil modelling

How accurate is the understanding of housing growth potential? Can the forecast be relied on to make the current proposal viable and will schools be in the right locations to serve future housing growth?

Somerset County Council develops pupil forecasts to allow for long-term planning. These forecasts are published online. The last published forecast was in 2019. To inform this process, an update was developed with latest intelligence which is current up to mid-September 2020.

We use Department for Education guidance for these forecasts. The guidance puts conditions on what we can and cannot take into account.

Although the DfE guidance does recommend the use of District Councils' five year housing land supply data, they are also clear that there must be a degree of certainty that the dwellings will be completed within the forecast period. For the 2019 School

Population forecasts this is 2019-2024. It is not possible to include a housing development that hasn't been included in a five-year housing land supply paper without at least an application having been submitted for a proposed development. The local authority works closely with South Somerset District Council so that the most up to date housing trajectories can be considered in our planning. Forecasts always involve uncertainty, both about whether these things will happen at all, and if they do happen, when the pupils will arrive in local schools. The growth in pupil numbers is not guaranteed in any area. However, given the level of housing that is being proposed for Crewkerne, additional pupil numbers arising from new developments is likely. In the Crewkerne area there are currently planning applications for approximately 940 houses of which around 800 have yet to be included in our published forecasts. Based on the Council's pupil yield for new housing, which is 32 primary aged pupils per 100 dwellings then 800 new homes could yield a further 256 primary aged pupils. 800 new homes could also yield a further 112 secondary aged pupils (14 secondary aged pupils per 100 dwellings)

The current proposals have been designed to reflect the level of uncertainty and mitigate against the risk that schools have too few pupils or too many. The schools that are proposed could operate at the level of the current forecast, though this is a low level and it would be inadvisable to propose schools any smaller. They would also have sufficient additional capacity to grow. The maximum capacity of the school proposed to be primary schools in Crewkerne and surrounding villages is 1140 (Maiden Beech, Ashlands, St Bart's, Haselbury Plucknett, Hinton St George and Merriott). The secure forecast for the town and surrounding villages for the year 2024 is 691 pupils. With an additional 256 primary aged pupils this could grow to 947. While it is highly unlikely that all possible housing growth would materialise, even the highest possible number could be accommodated.

NOTE the numbers in the paragraphs above have been corrected subsequent to the publication of the Non-Key Decision. These changes do not have a material impact on the conclusion drawn.

Is there enough space at the first schools for them to become primary schools?

In Crewkerne, to achieve a transition from a three-tier system to a two-tier system, admissions numbers would need to be adjusted. In becoming primary schools, the first schools would need to take a smaller number of pupils for a period of time during the transition period. All the schools have been allocated a 'target' intake in the proposal, which is the number they would reach by the end of transition. If they took the targeted intake numbers at the outset it would mean they would grow too large for their accommodation. At the same time, Maiden Beech would have a higher intake at first, which would allow the school to establish pupil numbers quickly, otherwise it would be very small in numbers for too long. So, the first schools would be large enough, but only by taking a reduced intake during the transition. This is what has been modelled and would mitigate this potential issue.

Specifically relating to the village of Merriott, the County Council recognises that pupil numbers are likely to increase due to new housing developments. Because of this the Council has requested and secured education contributions through a Section 106.¹ The Council will continue to request education contributions to applications coming forward where we have the evidence to support this. A scoping exercise to identify the exact location where a new additional classroom or classrooms could be installed will be commissioned in 2021 so that when pupil numbers do increase the Council can respond in a timely way. This will take place regardless of the outcome of the current consultation.

¹ This is for planning application 18/00688. This was secured through what is called 'a unilateral undertaking' following a successful appeal of planning application 18/01917.

Would admission numbers be too small in Crewkerne to keep siblings in the same school?

In the published local authority admission arrangements, priority is given for siblings where there is an existing sibling link at the time of admission. However, no guarantee is ever given that siblings can attend the same school when the school is over-subscribed.

In any year, for schools where the local authority is the admissions authority it will consider whether admissions over the limit can be accommodated. This will be looked at on case by case basis and in a dialogue with the school. Parents also have a right of appeal.

There would be a risk that with a lower admission limit that more siblings may not get a place than would ordinarily be the case. In the context of this reorganisation, the local authority would commit to securing a place for catchment siblings during the transition years where the admission number was lower, even if this took the school intake over the admission number. Out-of-catchment siblings are never guaranteed a place, and this would be the same in this context.

Would catchment areas need to change?

Not necessarily, no. The proposal is that catchment areas would remain the same for all Local Authority Schools. However it has been suggested to the Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust that, for a Maiden Beech Primary School, they remove the priority for catchment pupils from the over-subscription criteria so that all children who do not fall into a higher criteria (for example, Looked After Child, siblings, etc.) are prioritised under the final criteria of distance to school as a straight line

measurement. This is the simplest solution and does not involve the challenges of re-drawing catchment boundaries in a meaningful way or having several dual catchment areas across Crewkerne.

The first schools would retain their existing catchment areas as there is no benefit to be gained by changing them. While two schools in Crewkerne would have catchments and one not, in practice, admissions in Crewkerne would operate on a 'nearest to school' basis for all schools, including those with catchments. This is because, with only two catchments in the town, there would always be children in the St Barts or Ashlands catchments who could not be accommodated in those schools. When there are more catchment pupils than spaces, all children within the catchment are given preference on a 'nearest to school' basis. So this would be the same in practice for all three schools.

With regards to the proposed closure of Misterton First School, under this model the catchment area would be absorbed by St Bartholomew's Primary School. This school is geographically nearest to Misterton First School.

4. Finance

What would be the cost of redundancy?

It is difficult at this early stage of the process to predict with any certainty what the costs might be in relation to the restructuring of staff. This is because proposed structures have not yet been determined and would not be determined until the autumn term 2021 in the event the decision was taken to proceed. In order to provide an indication of what the potential redundancy costs might be we have applied a formula of average pupil/teacher ratios from similar schools (based on the FFT Schools Like Yours model) to provide a baseline to assess the current staffing

structures. The overall net outcome of this results in the potential for **11.75** teaching posts to be at risk of redundancy in Crewkerne with estimated associated redundancy costs of **£235.5k** based on an average redundancy cost of £20k per teacher. These figures take into consideration natural turnover of staff which is around 6% nationally for teachers.

The top end estimate for redundancy costs in Ilminster is based on an evaluation of the staffing structure for SLT, Site staff and back office functions and identification of possible roles with overlapping responsibilities, which results in an estimated redundancy cost of **£123k**.

The estimate is that redundancy costs would fall somewhere in a window of between **£50k** and **£359k**. however, it does not reflect the potential to redeploy staff as an alternative to redundancy. The aim of the project, if agreed, would be to avoid redundancy wherever possible, which is a fundamental principle as set out within the draft HR Protocols and Principles and therefore a low outturn as near to the minimum as possible would be the goal.

It should be noted these predictions in no way pre-determine the staffing structures within the schools going forward and have been included for estimated cost purposes only.

What would be the cost of refurbishment?

A preliminary estimate of possible costs for works arising from the proposals has been undertaken. The two schools where refurbishment would be necessary are Swanmead and Maiden Beech. An estimate has also been included for potential works relating to Ashlands should space be required to accommodate displaced pupils from Misterton. However, there is no assumption that pupils and parents from

Misterton school would choose this option should the proposals be implemented. The total cost of the estimate for works is **£1.3 million** including inflation. Based on current assessments this level of refurbishment would be achievable within a 12-month period.

What would be the cost of transport?

Transport costs vary according to individual pupil need, year by year, however, the proposals, if implemented would result in two additional year groups requiring transport from Ilminster to Crewkerne. The estimate is that this would incur costs in the region of **£198k** annually.

One of the issues raised in the consultation related to the current unavailability of school transport to allow pupils to take part in after-school activities. If proposals were implemented, the additional investment would make it possible to secure a later returning bus into Ilminster for pupils in all year groups. Wadham School has given a commitment that it would organise after school activities in such a way as to respond to this opportunity. This would improve the educational opportunities offered to any pupil living in Ilminster and travelling to Wadham.

Additionally, there may arise a need to provide transport for Misterton pupils displaced into a Crewkerne school for a transition period. The estimate for this time-limited cost is up to **£36k**. However, around half of Misterton pupils already reside in Crewkerne, and therefore depending on parental choices and where pupils choose to attend, the final cost could be significantly lower.

Would this proposal ensure that Wadham wouldn't have future financial difficulties?

The projected numbers for Wadham as a secondary school are between 700 and 800, compared to 443 at present. This would make a very significant difference to its finances by reducing the diseconomies of scale it currently experiences. We have several other schools of this size in the county that are financially viable.

Would new primary schools in Crewkerne get transitional funding?

The changing admission numbers that are proposed for new primary schools in Crewkerne would result in schools in the area having to manage lower pupil numbers for a number of years during transition. Without transitional funding, this could result in an inability to maintain staffing levels.

Transitional funding would be made available. The government guidance allows for variations in the number of pupils on roll due to reorganisation. Discussions are already underway with the Schools Forum Technical Working Group about criteria for use of the Growth Fund, as Schools Forum is the decision-making body for this spending. These would be finalised should this progress, and schools in this situation would be given a 'minimum funding guarantee' based on the level of funding given to schools of the target size (3, 5 or 7 years) in the county.

5. Alternatives to the proposal

Could restructure be avoided if the middle schools and upper school joined the same Multi Academy Trust (MAT)?

Whilst in principle a single MAT could potentially be part of a solution for education provision in the area, in practice Maiden Beech Academy is part of the Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust (BTCT) and in order for all schools to sit within the same trust, BTCT would need to adopt church articles, with the permission of the Diocese

of Bath and Wells. BTCT does not have church articles, and while conversations have taken place over the past few years about the prospect of BTCT adopting church articles, the outcome of this discussion concluded with no further action. Therefore, there is no prospect in the foreseeable future of a single trust solution for these three schools.

Prior to the current consultation, the Regional Schools Commissioner engaged other multi-academy trusts in discussion about the prospect of taking on Wadham School as a solution to the structural deficit. These conversations were not productive, as the issue of low pupil numbers and financial deficit would remain whether the school was located within a trust or not.

Could Greenfylde become the only primary school in Ilminster?

The current capacity of Greenfylde First School is 380 places. The site comprises three permanent blocks supported by a number of temporary units, located around a central play area. There are no on-site playing fields and the school site provides no further opportunity for expansion.

The County Council's current pupil forecasts indicate that there will be 430 primary aged pupils requiring a place in 2022, 420 in 2023 and 416 in 2024. In addition, there are currently planning applications for 688 dwellings in Ilminster of which 552 are still pending approval. The latest forecasts currently make an allowance for 248 dwellings. Due to forecast pupil numbers and planned housing growth, both school sites in Ilminster would need to be retained.

Could you have fewer primary schools in Crewkerne and close Maiden Beech?

Forecast pupil numbers for the primary phase are only available until 2024. From 2024 onwards we have set put a plan based on conservative assumptions around housing growth. In the Crewkerne area there are currently planning applications for approximately 940 houses of which around 800 have yet to be included in our published forecasts. 800 new homes could yield a further 256 primary aged pupils. By creating 3 primary schools in the town the local authority is future proofing provision and will be able to expand schools to meet need of future housing in the town.

We calculate that each new dwelling results in 0.32 primary aged pupils. Establishing Ashlands and St Bart's as the only primary schools for the town would deliver a capacity of 420 places but both schools would be full and would have no room for any further growth. The Council aims to maintain a 4.5% surplus capacity in schools to ensure it can deliver additional places in line with demand and parental preferences.

Could Maiden Beech or Swanmead be the secondary school rather than Wadham?

Neither Maiden Beech (capacity 492) nor Swanmead (capacity 348) is big enough to accommodate the 780 students that are forecast to be in the system in 2022 and beyond coupled with the additional housing planned in the area. Significant capital investment would be required to increase its capacity, and this would be a poor use of public funds when there is a suitable secondary site already available.

A number of respondents expressed a strong preference for a secondary school in Ilminster. It would be ideal to have a secondary school in every locality, However, in a rural county, by necessity some localities will have the benefit of a nearby secondary school and others will not.

The evidence suggests that it is harder for very small schools to reach high standards and they can struggle financially. In Somerset, the schools with consistently the highest performance are The Blue School, The Castle School and Kings of Wessex. The pupil populations in these schools are around 1500, 1200 and 1100 respectively. In Ilminster, there are approximately 75 pupils in each year group. This represents 375 secondary-aged pupils. While it is possible to provide secondary education at such a small size, it is not recommended and creates a significant struggle to provide education that is of consistently high quality. In Somerset, St Dunstan's and King Arthur's operate at a similar size. St Dunstan's is now good but was judged inadequate in 2016. King Arthur's inspection record was cleared when it became an academy but it was previously judged inadequate (2017) having been judged to require improvement on two occasions prior to that. Nationally, a higher proportion of very small schools are judged requires improvement or inadequate than the national average.

Therefore, it is possible for secondary schools to be very small, and schools that are already in operation at that size should be supported to be the best they can be, however it is inadvisable to create a new school knowing that it would face significant barriers to delivering high quality education. Given that Wadham is the highest performing school for secondary aged pupils at present in the area, and is large enough to accommodate all secondary-aged pupils without refurbishment or development, this is the strongest option.

Could Ashlands and St Bartholomew's be infant schools and Maiden Beech the junior school?

This option was discounted for several reasons. Both infant schools would be in the region of only 90-100 pupils each although they would have capacity to grow. However, unless both schools agreed to join the Bridgwater College Academy Trust you would be simply replicating the three-tier system just with a transition point at 6

instead of 9. In Ilminster an all through primary has been proposed as both schools are maintained by the local authority.

Could all primaries in Crewkerne have an admission number of 30?

The proposal is that there would be three primaries in Crewkerne and the admission numbers would be 20, 20 and 30 respectively. Ideally, all three schools would become primaries with a 30 intake and seven classrooms. However, based on current information about pupil numbers, including what is currently assured in terms of housing growth, there would not be enough pupils in Crewkerne and surrounding villages to provide an additional 20 pupils across the area. The forecast is that there will be 114 pupils each year, including in surrounding villages, and numbers could not be raised in Crewkerne without reducing the number of pupils in village schools which would take them below the advisable minimum of three classes.

If schools were allowed to take 30 pupils in all schools, even if there were not enough pupils to fill these classes, it would create intense competition in the area which has happened in other areas and is known to be very damaging to relationships and collaboration. It can also create volatility for the schools and create a risk that any one school could find themselves without the pupil numbers to make them financially viable.

Admission numbers could, and would, be reviewed regularly during the ten-year period that is forecast. They would be revised upwards if pupil numbers were to increase. However, setting this expectation before the pupils had materialised would mean that schools would be intense competition with each other. We know from experience that this makes schools less financially stable, and relationships between schools can become dysfunctional and distrusting.

On balance, it would be better for schools and pupils to keep pupil admission numbers at a level that reflects the number of pupils in the area, and to revise accordingly should things change.

Could Misterton to become a primary school (and not close) by taking pupils currently allocated to Maiden Beech?

Maiden Beech capacity is 498. The proposal is that they would have 210 pupils in future. If 60 were reallocated to Misterton, this would result in 140 pupils on roll at Maiden Beech. The building would be more than 2/3 vacant. This is financially and operationally inadvisable as the school would not have sufficient funding with such a low intake to carry the cost of such a large site.

For Misterton, this would result in a two-class school of 56 pupils. This would involve redirecting pupils out of Crewkerne as there are only around 30 pupils in the village. In past years the first preferences for this school were 5 in 2020 1 in 2019. and in 2018 there were 3.

A two-class primary is not advised in terms of the ability of the school to deliver high standards and the minimum being proposed in the current model is three classes. This is because to avoid mixing key stages one class would be 24 pupils and the other 32.

It would not be viable to allocate an intake of 4 to Misterton with one class of 28. This would also leave Maiden Beech with six classes which is not deliverable within the 30-pupil limit for KS1 without mixing key stages.

Could a model of primary education be adopted that would retain specialist / discrete subject teaching?

Yes, however, if proposals were implemented this would be a decision for new school leaders in Ilminster. In Crewkerne, good working relationships exist between school leaders and the County Council would actively support schools to explore options to retain subject specialism in innovative ways.

Could the transition period be phased in some way?

The transfer of pupils into new schools, for example from middle schools into a new secondary school, would have to happen at the same time. This is because making the change would require reorganisation of staff across schools, and this can only be done fairly if all staff across both areas have the opportunity to apply for vacancies created by a restructure at the same time.

However, it would be entirely possible, and in fact advisable, to phase the process of induction and familiarisation for pupils. There would be around 450 pupils who would need to transition into Wadham at the same time if proposals were implemented. If all pupils had to be inducted at the same time this could create a challenging environment. However, there would be ways to structure the process of familiarisation over a longer period than is usual, as the need to prepare for transition would be known 18 months in advance.

6. Implementation

Is it possible to convert Maiden Beech into a Primary School?

A preliminary feasibility appraisal suggests this can be done at reasonable cost. The first crucial step would be to equip the school with accommodation to deliver a KS1 curriculum. If these proposals are approved a full feasibility study would be

commissioned but a preliminary scoping exercise has suggested that block E might be remodelled to provide this KS1 facility. A phased programme of works would be required as the new primary grew in numbers.

Should the implementation date be later?

There are three main issues which would affect the timing of implementation: refurbishment, staff training and the timeline for amalgamation in Ilminster. All of these can be implemented by September 2022 therefore there is no strong case that has yet been made to delay.

7. Quality of education

Is Wadham a good enough school to be expanded in this way?

All the schools affected by proposals are good or outstanding, as judged by Ofsted. There is no reason to think this would change as a result of these proposals.

In terms of Key Stage 4 (GCSEs), there have been concerns expressed about changing Wadham School into a secondary due to past performance. However, this school has seen a rapid trajectory of improvement in recent years and in the last published outcomes in 2019 was the highest performing school in the wider South Somerset / Dorset borders area.

School	Progress 8 score 2019	% Pupils with a good pass in English and Maths GCSE 2019
National average	0.0	43%
Wadham	+0.05	47%
Holyrood	-0.1	40%

Beaminster	-0.41	40%
Stanchester	-0.3	39%

The progress and attainment of pupils in the area is contributed to by both the middle schools and the upper school. The performance of pupils in the two middle schools in 2014 (the year that the 2019 pupils took their KS2 exams) were above average in Crewkerne but below average in Ilminster. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the improvement in outcomes to put Wadham above the national average represents a real improvement during years 9 to 11.

School	Reading, writing and maths Expected standard (Level 4) 2014	Reading writing and maths Higher level (Level 5) 2014
National average	79%	24%
Ilminster	60%	13%
Crewkerne	83%	24%

Results in Ilminster and Crewkerne for KS2 are partly the result of education in first schools and partly in middle schools. Results in the Crewkerne area are around average over three years. In Ilminster over a three-year period they have been below average.

School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-year average • Reading, writing and maths • Expected standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three-year average • Reading, writing and maths • Higher standard
National	63%	11%
Ilminster	58%	5%
Crewkerne	62%	9%

Overall, standards in the area are neither very high nor very low. This means that change could bring improvements, through aligning national testing with school phases. This would mean that these tests provide more useful information to schools

and parents than they do now. It also means that, while there are unquestionably good leaders and teachers in the area, it is not the case that the area has such high outcomes that there could be no room for improvement.

All data is from the government's performance tables, available here: [Search for schools and colleges to compare - GOV.UK - Find and compare schools in England \(compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/search/schools-and-colleges-to-compare)

Would this mean teaching classes across key stages?

Potentially it may result in teaching mixed-year classes but until numbers of pupils in each cohort within individual schools are known, it is difficult to confirm if some classes will have a mix of key stages. Although a challenge in terms of planning, many small schools achieve this very effectively already and these can be drawn upon for exemplars. The ability range in a single year class can often exceed that in a mixed age setting.

Would it make class sizes too big?

Local authorities, governing bodies and academy trusts are subject to a statutory duty to limit the size of infant classes for KS1 children taught by a single qualified teacher to 30 or below. There is no statutory limit on the size of any class above Key Stage One (KS1) however governing bodies and academy trusts structure KS2 to ensure reasonable class sizes. The pupil modelling for the proposed structure demonstrates that pupils in KS1 can be accommodated without breaching the statutory limit.

Can a split site primary school work? Doesn't this just create another transition point from KS1 to KS2?

Very effective examples of split-site schools already exist in other parts of the county and they are further apart than the proposed model in Ilminster. Again, with creative

planning and staffing structures, pupils (and staff), would have the opportunity to work on both sites, minimising the impact of an artificial transition point at Year 3.

Would pupils with SEND get lost in transition?

Research on transition suggests that vulnerable pupils are always at risk in any transition. With fewer transition points, there would be less opportunity for pupils with SEND to be lost. Appropriate and effective support for these pupils is a statutory requirement and teachers, SENCOs and school leaders would have the same responsibility for their pupils as they do now. However, given the unusual nature of the changes proposed, additional support and planning would be put in place to secure the position of any pupil with SEND or who was known to social care. This level of scrutiny has been put in place during the pandemic to assess risk to pupils when bubbles are asked to self-isolate, and similar actions would be take if these proposals were to be implemented.

8. School staff

Would there be enough time to appoint a leader in Ilminster, and is there a way to manage the period before amalgamation?

If a decision to proceed was taken, it is anticipated the appointment to the Head Teacher post would take place during the latter part of the Spring term 2021 with a view to an offer of appointment being made for the successful candidate to take up post September 2021.

Depending on whether the post is ring fenced to the existing Ilminster Head Teachers or advertised externally, this could result in the successful candidate not being able to take up post until January 2022 which could place some pressure on the timeline at the early stages but would still be achievable.

The process by which the appointment of the Head Teacher of the primary school would be carried out would be determined by a joint working group made up of representatives from the governing bodies of Greenfylde and Swanmead.

The proposed timeline of September 2022 to implement the staffing structure is achievable, however, for Ilminster, the ability to do this this would be very much reliant on the successful appointment to the Head Teacher post and timing of this as this post will be critical to the process of designing the staff structure for the new school and for leading and managing the amalgamation of the two schools.

The creation of a Hard Federation between the governing bodies of the two schools in Ilminster during the transition period would help to ensure a successful appointment to the Head Teacher post is made and would also support the process to ensure the successful delivery of this project. Initial discussions with both Governing Bodies regarding the proposal for a hard federation have already taken place and responses to this as a strategy have been positive to date with both recognising the benefits of this, if required.

Would staff be able to teach in a different phase?

A qualified teacher can teach in any phase, and teachers in academies are not required to have any teaching qualification. However, teachers would be concerned about gaps in their knowledge that might make it difficult for them to adapt to a different educational environment. We have committed, should a decision be taken to implement, to undertake a rapid review of areas of expertise where staff felt that they would need support and/or training. This may involve details of assessment practices, for example. However, the overall goal across Somerset is to embed a 2-19 view of curriculum, and step away from assessment-driven teaching. This is in-line with the new Ofsted Framework and evidence about what makes effective teaching.

Therefore, teachers with a strong understanding of other phases are likely to support this direction of travel.

9. Travel, transport and environmental impacts

Would it be harmful to pupils if they had to travel from Ilminster to Crewkerne two years earlier?

Somerset County Council supports cycling and walking as the preferred methods for pupils to travel to school. These options are better for the environment and are good for children's mental and physical health. However, in a rural county, school transport is an unavoidable feature of the education system. Stanchester, Sexey's, King Arthur's and Ansford are all secondary schools and all serve rural communities where school transport is in use from Year 7 onwards. Dedicated school transport in Somerset provides travel to school for:

- 1356 pupils in Year 7 (or 17% of those travelling)
- 1428 pupils in Year 8 (or 18% of those travelling)

It is clearly better for pupils to be able to travel to school without relying on school transport, however, travelling at a younger age is common practice and has not been found to have a more detrimental impact on younger children compared to those who are older.

10. Misterton First School

Could Misterton be kept open through: federation with another local school; conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust?

Misterton First School is already federated with Ashlands. Because the case for closure depends on low pupil numbers across the area, collaborative groupings do not have the potential to mitigate the need for closure. Neither the current grouping nor any possible alternative grouping would create more pupils or change the nature of the area-wide issues.

Could Misterton be kept open through: scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities e.g. childcare facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc

There is already an Early Years setting within Misterton (Misterton Pre-School). This setting is currently in difficulties due to low pupil numbers and is facing closure. This reinforces the wider issues facing the area and exemplifies the challenges in sustaining services for children within Misterton proper.

In terms of providing an alternative to closure, the case is based on proposals which would create a significant surplus of places within the area, and therefore alternative uses for the site would not have an impact on the factors that would necessitate closure.

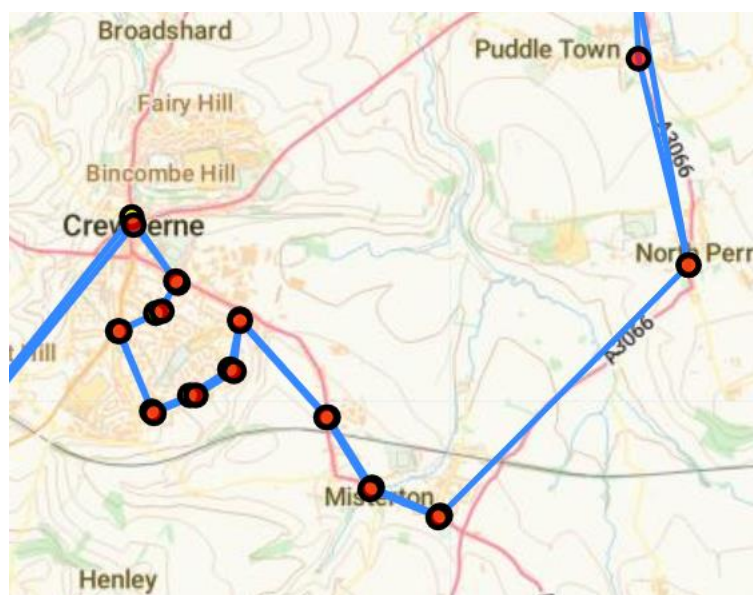
What would be the transport implications of closing Misterton? i.e. the availability, and likely cost of transport to other schools and sustainability issues

The walking distances between Misterton First School and other local schools are as follows:

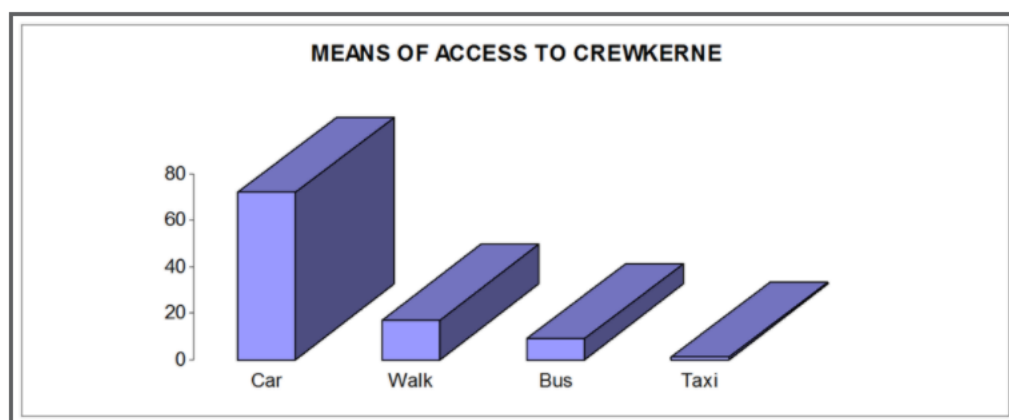
St Bartholomew's	1.3 miles (West)
Maiden Beech	1.7 miles (West)

Ashlands	1.9 miles (North West)
Parrett and Axe (Dorset)	2.2 miles (South East)
Haselbury Plucknett	2.4 miles (North)

The proximity of the village of Misterton to other local schools means that there are likely to be schools within two miles regardless of where in the village or surrounding area a child lives. The Chard to Yeovil bus route (number 96) connects the following schools: St Bartholomew's, Misterton and Haselbury Plucknett. The inbound bus from Misterton to St Bartholomew's leaves at 7.30am and therefore is not timed for access to school. The outbound bus leaves at 3.15pm and therefore would be suitable for return to Misterton village.



However, Misterton Parish Council ([Traffic & Transport | Misterton Parish Council Website](#) | [Somerset](#)) reports that car is the preferred form of transport for village residents.



Misterton First School is located directly on a through road which can be congested. According to the Parish Council:

Whilst some of the village is subject to a 20mph speed limit from The White Swan to Misterton Garage, the remainder is a 30mph zone but from the reports of our CSW team, many motorists do not observe these limits. There are approximately 400 vehicle movements per hour during the day with more at peak times, such as dropping off and collecting from Misterton Primary School and various functions at the WI hall.

It is likely these proposals would have a negative impact on some families who would have longer travel to school. Somerset County Council's preferred mode of transport to school is for children to cycle or walk. This is better for the environment as well as being the best option for children's mental and physical health.

However, it is already the case that a significant number of families drive their children to school in Misterton. Of the 31 children currently attending Misterton, 14 live in one of the Crewkerne catchment areas (Ashlands or St Bart's). The school is not ideally located from an environmental perspective, being on a busy main road with the associated air quality and traffic safety implications this brings.

An assessment of the walking route from Misterton to Crewkerne has been undertaken by the County Highways Department, however, this is the same route

which is currently used by pupils resident in Misterton to attend Maiden Beech in year 5 and 6 and as such, would not represent a change.

(NOTE the text in the paragraphs above have been corrected subsequent to the publication of the Non-Key Decision. These changes do not have a material impact on the conclusion drawn.)

Overall, it is not clear that the environmental impact would be significantly negative. While some children from Misterton would have longer travel distances, others would attend schools closer to home and be able to walk or cycle. St Bart's (the nearest alternative school) is more appropriately located within green space, set back from the main road and with designated arrangements for parking and car access.

What would be the overall and long-term impact on the local community if Misterton was closed? Would it mean the loss of the building as a community facility?

There is clearly a negative impact on any rural village community to lose any facility and Somerset is committed to preserving its villages and outstanding rural character. As part of the consultation, residents have expressed their concern that losing the village school would precipitate further loss of young families. However, at present there are 30 children in Misterton village in Reception to Year 4 but only 17 attend Misterton First School. This suggests that there are parents who choose to live in the village but educate their children in other area schools.

If Misterton closed as a school, it is not necessarily the case that it would be lost as a community facility. The building is owned by the church and the Diocese have indicated their willingness to consider other uses. We would be keen to see the building that is currently used for Misterton First School retained for community use and encouraged stakeholders to give responses on potential alternative usage for

the site. No options have yet been put forward but this would continue to be explored if the process were to continue.

Would good schools in the area have the capacity to accommodate displaced pupils?

Yes. The current model demonstrates that all pupils could be accommodated at Ashlands. However, pupils would be free to attend a school of their choice. The proposed model of school organisation would include around 250 unused spaces and therefore space would be freely available.