

# Proposed closure of Broad Oak Community Primary School

## Community Impact Assessment

### Issue no. 2.0

#### Introduction

Broad Oak Community Primary School is located in the village of Broad Oak, Heathfield, East Sussex.



The village of Broad Oak is in the Parish of Heathfield and Waldron, which is in Wealden District.



Covering 322 square miles, Wealden is the largest district in East Sussex and is classified as one of the most rural districts in England. Half the population lives in the five main towns of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield. The rest live in rural villages and hamlets.

The parish includes the market town of Heathfield and the villages of Waldron, Cross-in-Hand, Broad Oak, Old Heathfield and part of Punnetts Town. Heathfield is surrounded by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Impact on pupils

The closure proposal would directly affect pupils currently in Reception to Year 5 at Broad Oak. It is apparent from the information provided that, were Broad Oak to close, there would be sufficient places in the surrounding Heathfield area schools to accommodate the estimated 40 Reception to Year 5 pupils who would be displaced from the school at the end of the academic year and the two children who have expressed a first preference for a reception place at Broad Oak in 2020/21. Year 6 pupils currently at Broad Oak would not be directly impacted as they will move on to secondary school in the new academic year.

### **Potential Impact:**

The main changes for pupils in Reception to Year 5 would be:

- A new school
- A new route to school
- A new uniform
- New teachers and support staff
- A new learning environment
- Changed friendship groups

Responses to the consultation and subsequent statutory proposal indicated that parents and carers were concerned about the impact on the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

### **Mitigating Factors:**

On 24 February 2020 the Lead Member approved a change to the Heathfield schools community area from the 2021/22 academic year to incorporate the Broad Oak community area. This would ensure that should Broad Oak close, children living in the school's community area would have access to other local schools. In approving the change it was decided that merging the community areas would be of benefit to local families whether Broad Oak closes or not, as it would broaden the range of options available within the area.

Every pupil would be guaranteed the offer of a place at an alternative primary school in their local area. The schools identified as being within a reasonable distance of Broad Oak are:

- All Saints and St Richards CE Primary School
- Cross in Hand CE Primary School
- Parkside Community Primary School
- Parkside Community Primary School
- Dallington CE Primary School
- Maynards Green Community Primary School
- Mayfield CE Primary School
- Five Ashes CE Primary School
- Burwash CE Primary School

The local authority would be responsible for overseeing the process of closing the school and would work closely with the school to implement closure, including supporting pupils during their final months at Broad Oak and in their transition to a new school. Parents and carers of children at the school would be able to express a preference for a place at an alternative school. Parents and carers would be asked to complete an admissions application form and to name up to three schools they would prefer their child/ren to attend. Parents and carers would be offered a school place either at one of their preferred schools named on the application form or, if this is not possible, at the nearest school to the child's home where a place is available. The local authority would try to meet parents and carers preferences wherever possible but cannot guarantee to do so. The allocation of places would be made in line with the admissions policy as set out in the school admissions booklet which is available on the East Sussex website at:

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schools/admissions/>

The local authority would take all practicable steps to ease the transition for all pupils, including vulnerable groups. It would work with the receiving schools to arrange transition days for pupils to meet their new teachers and to familiarise themselves with their new environments.

Local authority support is available to schools, children and families for mental health and emotional wellbeing as set out in Appendix 4 of the 23 December 2019 Lead Member report. Some of the schools identified mention on their websites that second hand uniforms are available at a very low cost.

***Recommendation:***

That, in addition to the mitigations outlined above, the receiving schools would be asked to identify buddies for the incoming pupils to help further ease transition by ensuring there is a familiar face and an introduction to new friendship groups.

## **Impact on parents and families**

The Friends of Broad Oak School organise a number of events for parents of pupils in order to fund raise for the school. These include but are not limited to:

- Summer, Easter and Christmas Fayres
- Harvest Festival and supper
- Film nights
- Quizzes
- Book week events
- Christmas coffee morning
- Discos

Broad Oak also provides a breakfast club and a holiday club which has run for inset days so far, although the school has been looking to offer more dates throughout all holidays going forward.

***Potential Impact:***

If the proposals go ahead, it is likely that these events would cease.

***Mitigating Factors:***

Schools in the local area also provide events, clubs and wrap around care for pupils:

- All Saints and St Richards CE Primary School  
The PTA holds regular events including cake sales and film nights. The school also runs a number of before and after school clubs for pupils including archery, gymnastics, netball and fencing.
- Cross in Hand CE Primary School  
The school offers an extensive range of after school clubs, which include drawing, choir, drama, diamond dance, gymnastics, football, mandarin, tag rugby, karate, tennis and swimming.  
The Friends of Cross in hand school hold a number of different events during the year, including film nights, discos, a Christmas and a Summer Fair, quizzes and cake sales.
- Parkside Community Primary School  
The PTA holds events such as fireworks, quiz nights, ladies bingo, cake sales and a summer fete. The school has a breakfast club and an after school club, as well as a number of extra-curricular clubs and activities including helping out on the school farm.
- Punnetts Town Community Primary School  
The Friends of Punnetts Town School hold a fundraising event at Easter, summer and Christmas. Maypole dancing is an annual tradition and other recent activities have included a Christmas shopping evening, a quiz night, film nights for the children and an annual theatre or pantomime trip.
- Dallington CE Primary School

After school clubs include Irish dancing, tag rugby, football, African drumming, choir, piano, great out tours and karate.

- **Maynards Green Community Primary School**

The Friends of Maynards Green School organise a range of social occasions as well as organising a variety of fund raising activities such as a summer fair, cake sales and a Christmas market. The school offers a breakfast club and after-school childcare.

- **Mayfield CE Primary School**

The Friends of Mayfield School organise events - recently a circus, an Easter parade, a pamper evening, a fashion show and a Christmas fair. The school offers a breakfast club and a range of after school clubs including drama, multi-skills, violin, guitar, bible explorers & craft, hockey, football and netball.

- **Five Ashes CE Primary School**

The school has a range of after school clubs including dance, tag rugby, pottery and a cookery club.

- **Burwash CE Primary School**

The school offers a number of after-school activities including football/cricket, netball, judo, gardening, mud kitchen club, film and newspaper club.

**Recommendation:**

That the local authority and/or the receiving schools be asked to let prospective parents know of any arrangements in the area for holiday clubs.

**Impact of the proposal on the local pre-school**

Broad Oak Pre-school offers early years provision for children aged 2-5. It operates from Broad Oak Village Hall. It works with all of the local primary schools to ensure that children have a managed transition to school.

**Potential impact:**

The proposed closure of the school would not directly impact Broad Oak Pre-school as it is not located on the school site. Its current cohort of 29 comes from a number of towns and villages:

**Home location of children attending Broad Oak Pre-school**

| Child's home location                               | Funded and non-funded 2, 3 and 4 year olds | % of cohort |
|---|--|-------------|
| Broad Oak   | 7  | 24%         |
| Heathfield  | 13   | 45%         |
| Burwash, Hailsham, Hawkhurst, Horam, Punnetts Town, | 9  | 31%         |

Source: February 2020 early years data

**Mitigating Factors:**

Children leaving the pre-school in September 2019 fed into nine different primary schools; fewer than five went to Broad Oak. In recent years very few children from Broad Oak attended their local pre-school.

**Recommendation:**

None

**Impact of proposal on the wider community**

Concerns were expressed that, should the proposed closure be implemented, the school premises would be lost as a community venue and local residents would lose access to a community defibrillator which is located on the school site.

Concerns were also expressed about the impact on the village shop which benefits from the passing trade brought by parents and pupils attending the school.

**Potential Impact:**

If the school were to close the local community would no longer be able to attend events at the school and would no longer have access to the defibrillator located there.

Schools act as employers and consumers in the local area. Parents of pupils attending the school may be more likely to spend locally. Sell et al (1996) studied the socio-economic impacts of school closures on North Dakota communities. They found a perceived decline in retail sales and the number of businesses in both communities where schools had closed and communities where schools had gained students due to the consolidation of schools. Those from communities where schools had closed were more likely to think this decline was due to the school closure. However, there was a lack of data to support their belief [1] [2]. A high proportion of pupils at the school do not live in Broad Oak so the school has had the effect of bringing in potential customers from outside the village.

**Mitigating Factors:**

If local volunteers wish to organise events for the village, there is at least one alternative venue in the village (Broad Oak Village Hall). The village hall is approximately 0.4 miles from the school, around a 10 minute walk.

In addition, Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council provide information on its website about a range of groups and events in the wider parish area that could be accessed by the local community. These include:

- Sports and fitness, such as bowls, table tennis, cricket, rugby, ramblers, folk dance and Tai Chi.
- Interests, such as History Society, Horticultural Society, Philatelic Society, choral society, Drama Club, Quilters and a Brass Band.
- Clubs and Groups, such as Rotary Club, Linked Hands Club, British Legion and the Women's Institute.

The Heathfield.net website indicates that Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) have also been installed at Broad Oak Village Hall and on the outside front wall of GO:VER Gym in Broad Oak. Therefore the community has access to alternative defibrillators in close proximity to the school. The defibrillator currently situated at Broad Oak could be relocated to an alternative community venue.

The economic benefits that a school brings to a community must be considered beneficial side effects to the main duty of a school which is to provide a quality education to its pupils. Numbers on roll, budget deficits and academic standards must be the major considerations in any decision on the future of a school and, while a community may be impacted by a decision to close a school; this cannot be an overriding factor. If the school closed, the local shop would be unable to rely on passing trade from the school community. This is already the case for 13 weeks of the year during school holidays. It would be for the local community to consider how to support local retail facilities.

**Recommendation:**

None

**Access to provision of same school designation**

Broad Oak is a non-denominational school. Currently there are 931 denominational places and 665 non-denominational places in the Heathfield area. Should Broad Oak close the number of non-denominational places would reduce to 525.

**Potential Impact:**

Some pupils currently in Reception to Year 5 at Broad Oak might be offered places at denominational schools.

**Mitigating Factors:**

It is not unusual for rural parts of the county to have only denominational schools and no community provision at all. Examples include the North Chailey, Battle, Robertsbridge and Wadhurst review areas. All non-denominational state funded schools in England have to provide collective worship of a 'broadly Christian character'. Denominational schools will provide worship in accordance with the trust deeds related to the school. The Diocese of Chichester Board of Education recognises "that Church schools serve the whole community and are not exclusive to worshipping families". Parental preference would be considered where possible when allocating alternative school places to pupils at Broad Oak but parents do have the right to have their children excused from worship in any state funded school, whether denominational or non-denominational.

The three non-denominational schools in the Heathfield area other than Broad Oak (Parkside, Punnetts Town and Maynards Green) currently have 10 spare community school places between them. Other community schools are available in the wider area surrounding Heathfield, for example in Hailsham where a number of pupils on roll at Broad Oak live.

**Recommendation:**

None

## Impact on neighbouring schools

If the proposal goes ahead and the school is closed, every pupil in Reception to Year 5 at Broad Oak would be offered a place at an alternative school, many of which are likely to be nearer to their home address.

**Potential Impact:**

At the October 2019 school census there were 1,306 pupils on roll across the nine schools in the Heathfield area with surplus places high at 19%. This is illustrated in the following table.

**Pupil numbers in the Heathfield area (October 2019)**

| Capacity                     | PAN        | YR         | Y1         | Y2         | Y3         | Y4         | Y5         | Y6         | Total       | Capacity    | Surplus    | % surplus  |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|
|                              |            | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        |             |             |            |            |
| Broad Oak                    | 20         | 5          | 1          | 6          | 9          | 8          | 6          | 17         | 52          | 140         | 88         | 63%        |
| All Saints' and St Richard's | 20         | 15         | 13         | 14         | 10         | 17         | 6          | 14         | 89          | 140         | 51         | 36%        |
| Cross-in-Hand                | 60         | 58         | 37         | 42         | 41         | 58         | 44         | 38         | 318         | 420         | 102        | 24%        |
| Dallington                   | 15         | 15         | 13         | 17         | 17         | 17         | 14         | 11         | 104         | 105         | 1          | 1%         |
| Five Ashes                   | 10         | 10         | 10         | 8          | 7          | 13         | 7          | 7          | 62          | 56          | 0          | 0%         |
| Mayfield                     | 30         | 20         | 20         | 27         | 25         | 23         | 24         | 21         | 160         | 210         | 50         | 24%        |
| Maynards Green               | 30         | 30         | 30         | 30         | 30         | 33         | 32         | 30         | 215         | 210         | 0          | 0%         |
| Parkside                     | 30         | 30         | 30         | 29         | 31         | 30         | 30         | 30         | 210         | 210         | 0          | 0%         |
| Punnetts Town                | 15         | 15         | 12         | 16         | 12         | 14         | 17         | 10         | 96          | 105         | 9          | 9%         |
| <b>Totals</b>                | <b>230</b> | <b>198</b> | <b>166</b> | <b>189</b> | <b>182</b> | <b>213</b> | <b>180</b> | <b>178</b> | <b>1306</b> | <b>1596</b> | <b>301</b> | <b>19%</b> |

Data source: October 2019 school census

In the absence of the official January 2020 school census data, which will not be released by the DfE until mid to late March 2020, the local authority has undertaken an interim assessment of capacity in local schools using pupil number returns submitted by schools in January and February 2020. This has enabled the local authority to assess, albeit informally, the capacity of schools in the Heathfield area to accommodate displaced pupils from Broad Oak should it close on 31 August 2020. The information is provided in the table below.

**Provisional pupil numbers in the Heathfield area (January / February 2020)**

| Capacity                     | PAN        | YR         | Y1         | Y2         | Y3         | Y4         | Y5         | Y6         | Total       | Capacity    | Surplus    | % surplus  |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|
|                              |            | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        | 230        |             |             |            |            |
| Broad Oak                    | 20         | 6          | 1          | 7          | 10         | 9          | 7          | 17         | 57          | 140         | 83         | 59%        |
| All Saints' and St Richard's | 20         | 15         | 13         | 13         | 10         | 17         | 6          | 13         | 87          | 140         | 53         | 38%        |
| Cross-in-Hand                | 60         | 58         | 40         | 43         | 41         | 64         | 47         | 42         | 335         | 420         | 85         | 20%        |
| Dallington                   | 15         | 15         | 12         | 17         | 18         | 17         | 13         | 11         | 103         | 105         | 0          | 0%         |
| Five Ashes                   | 10         | 10         | 10         | 8          | 7          | 14         | 7          | 7          | 63          | 56          | 0          | 0%         |
| Mayfield                     | 30         | 21         | 22         | 28         | 25         | 19         | 24         | 21         | 160         | 210         | 50         | 24%        |
| Maynards Green               | 30         | 32         | 30         | 29         | 30         | 32         | 32         | 31         | 216         | 210         | 0          | 0%         |
| Parkside                     | 30         | 30         | 29         | 30         | 31         | 30         | 30         | 30         | 210         | 210         | 0          | 0%         |
| Punnetts Town                | 15         | 15         | 12         | 15         | 13         | 14         | 16         | 10         | 95          | 105         | 10         | 10%        |
| <b>Totals</b>                | <b>230</b> | <b>202</b> | <b>169</b> | <b>190</b> | <b>185</b> | <b>216</b> | <b>182</b> | <b>182</b> | <b>1326</b> | <b>1596</b> | <b>281</b> | <b>18%</b> |

Data source: Pupil number returns by schools in January and February 2020

Pupil numbers across the nine schools have increased by 20 to 1,326 since the October 2019 school census, with surplus places falling from 19% to 18%. Pupil numbers at Broad Oak have increased by 5 to 57, with surplus places reducing to 59%.

Schools operate most efficiently and effectively when full or nearly full. To this end the local authority seeks to keep the number of surplus places (the number of places in schools that are unfilled) to a minimum. However, it is generally accepted that not all unfilled places in a school are surplus places, but that a small margin of surplus capacity is often allowed to facilitate parental preference, to take account of the fact that schools with available places may not always be in the part of a planning area where the demand is, and to allow for a degree of error in the forecasts. A school is generally considered to be full when it has less than 5% of its places unfilled. This is in line with the National Audit Office report on Capital Funding for new school places published in 2013, where it states:

*“It is considered that on average 5 per cent was the bare minimum needed for authorities to meet their statutory duty with operational flexibility, while enabling parents to have some choice of schools”.*

In larger towns around one form of entry (30 intake places) is allowed while in other areas around half a form of entry (15 intake places) is allowed although margins vary depending on specific forecasts, capacities and circumstances. This figure is deemed to give the appropriate amount of flexibility in an area and is set against the need to ensure the efficient use of resources. In practice, the amount of surplus places planned for in an area will also take account of local circumstances.

By the closing date for primary school applications on 15 January 2020, Broad Oak had received two first preferences for its 2020/21 reception year intake. In comparison, the surrounding primary schools received the following first preferences:

#### First preferences for 2020/21

| School                       | PAN        | 1 <sup>st</sup> preferences |
|------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Broad Oak                    | 20         | 2                           |
| All Saints' and St Richard's | 20         | 12                          |
| Cross-in-Hand                | 60         | 48                          |
| Dallington                   | 15         | 12                          |
| Five Ashes                   | 10         | 4                           |
| Mayfield                     | 30         | 23                          |
| Maynards Green               | 30         | 40                          |
| Parkside                     | 30         | 39                          |
| Punnetts Town                | 15         | 19                          |
| <b>Totals</b>                | <b>230</b> | <b>199</b>                  |

Data source: School admissions system

The closure proposal would directly affect pupils currently in Reception to Year 5 at Broad Oak. It is apparent from the information provided that, were Broad Oak to close, there would be sufficient places in the surrounding Heathfield area schools to accommodate the estimated 40 Reception to Year 5 pupils who would be displaced from the school at the end of the academic year and the two children who have expressed a first preference for a reception place at Broad Oak in 2020/21. Year 6 pupils currently at Broad Oak would not be directly impacted as they will move on to secondary school in the new academic year.

The following tables show the local authority's projected pupil numbers for the Heathfield area to 2022/23, taken from the annual update to its pupil forecasts in July 2019. The local authority's pupil forecasts take account of factors such as the local birth rate in the area, demographic projections of future births and current housing plans in the area. Based on information currently available to the local authority on births, house building and future demographic growth in the area; it is confident there would be sufficient capacity in the area to meet future demand for places. The effect of Wealden District Council's recent decision to withdraw its Local Plan is considered later in the report.

### Reception intake and total number on roll forecasts

| Reception intake forecasts     | Combined PAN | 2018/19  |                |           | 2019/20  |                |           | 2020/21  |                |           | 2021/22  |                |           | 2022/23  |                |           |
|--------------------------------|--------------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|
|                                |              | Yr R NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Yr R NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Yr R NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Yr R NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Yr R NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % |
| Heathfield primary review area | 230          | 168      | 62             | 27%       | 198      | 32             | 14%       | 197      | 33             | 14%       | 168      | 62             | 27%       | 189      | 41             | 18%       |

| Number on roll forecasts       | Combined capacity | 2018/19   |                |           | 2019/20   |                |           | 2020/21   |                |           | 2021/22   |                |           | 2022/23   |                |           |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
|                                |                   | Total NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Total NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Total NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Total NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % | Total NOR | Surplus places | Surplus % |
| Heathfield primary review area | 1596              | 1299      | 297            | 19%       | 1317      | 279            | 17%       | 1347      | 249            | 16%       | 1354      | 242            | 15%       | 1343      | 253            | 16%       |

Source: January 2019 School Census and ESCC Pupil Forecasts 16.07.19

The Heathfield Primary Area Review Area contains the following schools: All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School; Cross-in-Hand CE Primary School; Parkside Community Primary School; Dallington CE Primary School; Broad Oak Community Primary School; Five Ashes CE Primary; Mayfield CE Primary School; Maynards Green Community Primary School and Punnetts Town Community Primary School

As can be seen from the information above, there are sufficient places in schools in the surrounding area to accommodate pupils from Broad Oak. Based on current pupil numbers across the nine schools, were Broad Oak to close surplus places in the area would reduce from 18% currently to 9%, still above the level recommended by the National Audit Office. Local schools should benefit from the proposal by reducing surplus places in the area and providing more certainty to the remaining schools about pupil numbers. The proposal should create a more sustainable network of schools in the local area thereby reducing the risk of more schools becoming unviable.

#### Mitigating Factors:

N/A

#### Recommendations:

None

### Impact on pupil travel arrangements

Traffic congestion in Heathfield was raised as a significant concern during both the consultation period and the subsequent representation period.

#### Potential Impact:

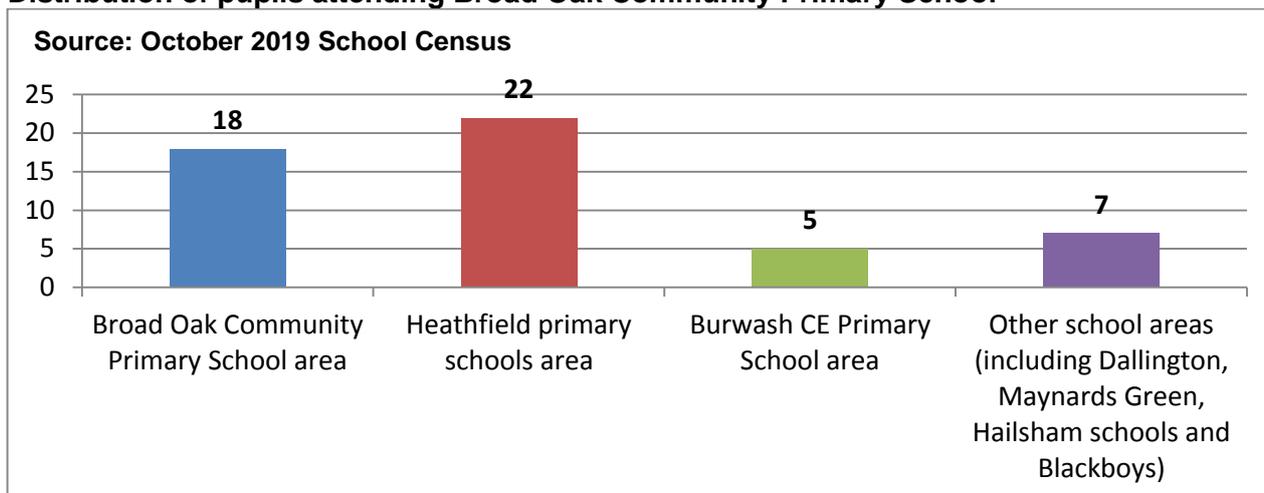
Some families may be impacted by additional travel costs and travel time. The closure of the school may impact members of the community who will have to go beyond the local village to engage with teachers and use community facilities. Respondents to the consultation cited the impact on traffic and the environment of children having to travel by car to their nearest alternative school.

#### Mitigating Factors:

According to the October 2019 school census there were 60 primary age pupils living in the Broad Oak community area attending state funded primary schools in East Sussex. Of these, only 18 (30%) attend Broad Oak. The remaining 70% attend other schools in the county.

The majority of pupils (65%) currently attending Broad Oak are from outside its community area, with the largest proportion (42%) living in the Heathfield schools community area. This is illustrated in the chart below.

### Distribution of pupils attending Broad Oak Community Primary School



From this information it is evident that the majority of pupils attending Broad Oak already face journeys to and from school each day, while most of the primary age pupils living in the Broad Oak community area also choose to travel to schools outside the community area rather than attend their local school. It is highly likely that journey times, and therefore the impact on traffic congestion and the environment, could be reduced in the event that Broad Oak closes as the majority of displaced pupils would have the opportunity to attend schools nearer to their home address.

Alternative schools are not far from the village and would be in travelling distance for community activities - between 1.5 and 5.4 miles away from Broad Oak as shown in the table below. For the majority of pupils and families these schools could be nearer to their home address.

### Distance from Broad Oak Community Primary School to alternative schools in the local area

| School                       | Distances in miles (rounded) |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| All Saints' and St Richard's | 1.5                          |
| Cross-in-Hand                | 2.3                          |
| Parkside                     | 2.5                          |
| Punnetts Town                | 2.3                          |
| Dallington                   | 3.8                          |
| Maynards Green               | 3.5                          |
| Mayfield                     | 3.7                          |
| Five Ashes                   | 5.4                          |
| Burwash                      | 5.1                          |

Latest analysis shows that of the 40 Reception to Year 5 pupils likely to be affected by the proposal, approximately 60% live nearer, or the same distance, to an alternative school, with approximately 40% living further away. Free home to school transport would be provided for eligible pupils who meet the criteria set out in the link below. From the information currently available, the local authority considers that five pupils would be eligible for free home to school transport to their nearest alternative school, meaning the additional cost to the local authority would be negligible. The local authority acknowledges that some pupils living in the Broad Oak community area and attending the school might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day. However, for the majority their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance.

It is envisaged that displaced pupils would continue to be transported to and from school under arrangements made by their parents and carers and that, given the majority of pupils would be able to attend a school nearer to their home address it is unlikely there would be an increase in car usage. To the contrary, it would be hoped that car usage would reduce thereby having a positive impact on the environment.

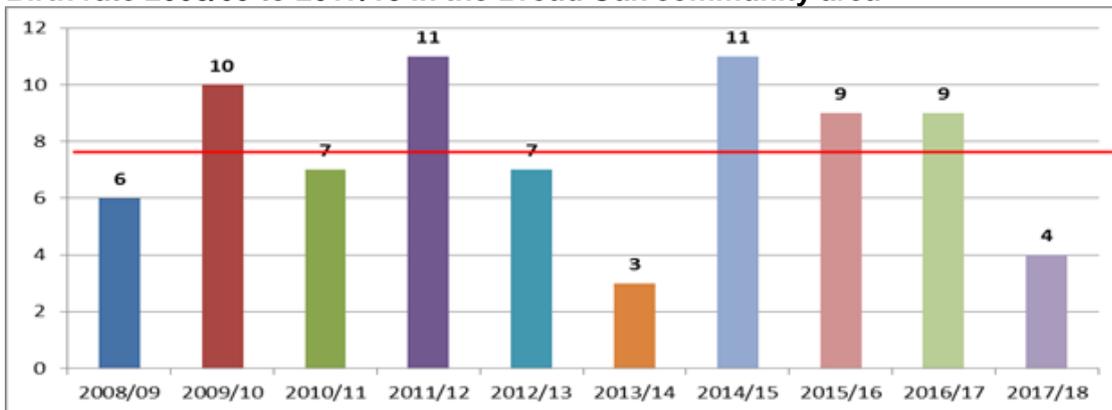
**Recommendation:**

None

**Impact on community demographics**

The 10-year average birth rate in the Broad Oak community area is less than 8 per annum (the school's published admission number is 20), with a high of 11 and a low of 3, as illustrated below.

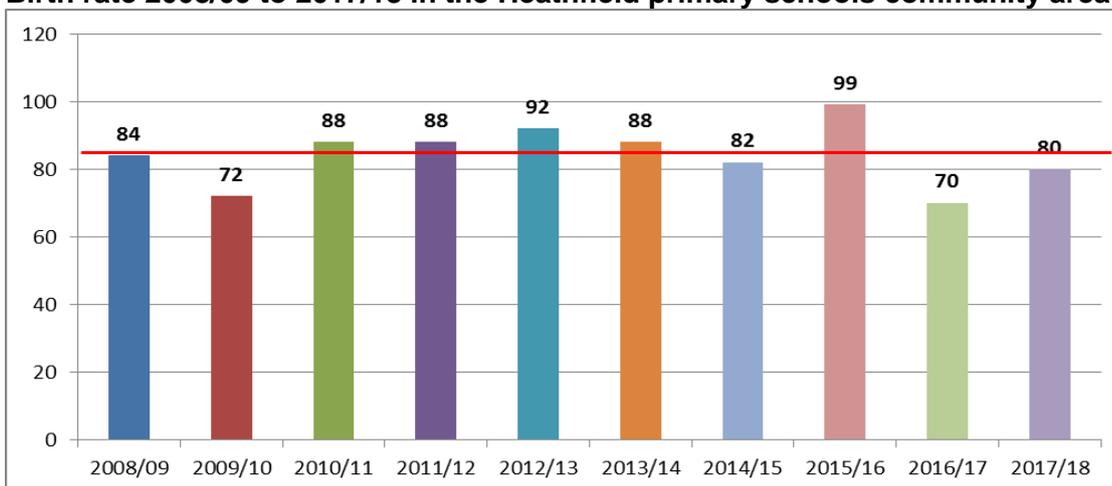
**Birth rate 2008/09 to 2017/18 in the Broad Oak community area**



Source: ONS Live Birth Data

In the same period, births in the Heathfield community area have averaged fewer than 85 a year, with a high of 99 and a low of 70 as demonstrated below.

**Birth rate 2008/09 to 2017/18 in the Heathfield primary schools community area**



Source: ONS Live Birth Data

Based on births alone the combined published admission number (110) of the three Heathfield schools (All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School, Cross-in-Hand CE Primary School and Parkside Community Primary School) would have been sufficient in each year of the ten years to accommodate all of the children born in the Heathfield and Broad Oak community areas.

Wealden District Council provides regular updates on housing numbers and trajectories to inform the local authority's pupil forecasts. The most recent update was provided in spring 2019 and showed that just short of 600 homes are planned in Heathfield and Waldron Parish during the Wealden Local Plan

period between 2018/19 and 2027/28. Within this total the Wealden Local Plan sets a windfall allowance of 50 dwellings for the village of Broad Oak over the same period.

The local authority's published pupil yields from new housing are:

**Pupil yields from new homes**

| Pupil yield per new dwelling by property type and size | Houses 2 bed+ | Flats 2 bed+ | Houses / flats 1 bed |
|--|---------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Primary schools  | 0.25          | 0.0375       | 0.00                 |

Taking these pupil yields into account and assuming that all new homes are houses with two bedrooms or more, in Heathfield and Waldron Parish as a whole the local authority estimates 150 additional primary age pupils would be generated across all year groups from new homes over a ten year period (approximately 21 additional pupils per year group). The housing specifically in the Broad Oak community area would, over the same period, generate an estimated 12 to 13 additional pupils (approximately 2 additional pupils per year group over the period). The demand for places is therefore likely to be in Heathfield rather than in Broad Oak. The local authority's pupil forecasts take account of these housing figures and the likely demand for school places they will generate.

On 19th February 2020 Wealden District Council (WDC) took the decision to withdraw its Local Plan after the Planning Inspector found that the Plan could not proceed in its current form. WDC has subsequently embarked on the process of developing a new Local Plan.

This will inevitably lead to a period of uncertainty while WDC reviews its position and begins to form an opinion on the likely quantum and location of future housing development it has to plan for in the district. What is almost certain is that this will lead to a greater number of new homes being built in the district in future years. What is less certain at this stage is how much more and where in the district this might happen. The details of this will become more apparent over time, but currently there are no indications from WDC that they will look to Heathfield or the village of Broad Oak to provide significantly more or any less housing than is already planned. Both settlements are prominent within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), where the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) specifically guards against large scale residential development.

**Potential Impact:**

The closure of the school could have the effect of making the village less attractive to families with school age children and so attracting an older population.

**Mitigating Factors:**

The local authority must continue to discharge its statutory duty in terms of ensuring there are sufficient school places to meet demand and that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of their local community and makes best use of public funding. In the absence of any new information from WDC the local authority has to take account of what is currently known and develop its school place planning strategies accordingly.

While some may argue that Broad Oak should remain open until there is more certainty about the future position in Wealden, the local authority considers that this would create its own uncertainty for the school community and is unlikely to immediately affect pupil numbers at the school and in the wider area. If the local authority finds in the future that there is a requirement for new places in the district as a result of new housing developments, it would look to provide these places locally to where the demand is.

It is not the school's or the local authority's role to seek to encourage families with young children to move to the village and indeed the resources required to attempt to do so would be prohibitive and likely to be of little effect.

**Recommendations:**

None

## Summary and conclusions of the potential impact on the community

The community impact assessment has identified a number of possible areas where the proposal could have some negative impact on a small number of local families and the local community, but also some mitigating factors which limit the impacts.

| Issue                               | Potential Impact   | Mitigating Factors  | Conclusions   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Impact on pupils                    | Coping with change to a new school environment.  | The local authority and schools would work to minimise disruption of transition.  | Initially negative; later potentially positive in terms of widening peer groups and accessing different facilities.<br>Overall: Neutral |
| Impact on parents and families      | Loss of clubs and events.  | All the alternative schools provide a range of clubs and events.  | Neutral   |
| Impact on wider community           | Losing a community venue.  | Broad Oak has a village hall and the village is very close to Heathfield and other villages which host events in community venues.  | Potentially negative but could be mitigated by use of village hall.   |
|                                     | Local shop losing trade  | None  | Potentially negative  |
|                                     | Losing access to Community Defibrillator   | There are two further community defibrillators located in Broad Oak. The defibrillator at Broad Oak could be relocated to an alternative community venue.   | Neutral   |
| Access to same school designation   | A number of pupils could be offered places at denominational schools.  | Parents can opt their children out of collective worship in any school.   | Neutral   |
| Impact on neighbouring schools      | Neighbouring schools would offer places to pupils currently at Broad Oak.  | There are sufficient places at surrounding schools to take all the pupils from Broad Oak.   | Positive  |
| Impact on pupil travel arrangements | Some families may experience increased costs and travel time to school; others may experience reduced costs and travel time to school. | For the majority of pupils there are alternative schools nearer to their home address. Some pupils living in Broad Oak might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day. However | Potentially negative for pupils living in Broad Oak who might face longer journeys to and from school each day.                         |

| Issue                            | Potential Impact   | Mitigating Factors   | Conclusions |
|----------------------------------|--|--|-------------|
|                                  |  | for many their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance. Free home to school transport would be available for eligible pupils.  |             |
| Impact on community demographics | Closure of the school may impact the balance of community. | The birth rate in the village is low and projected to remain so. The majority of children in the village do not attend the local school. Very few of the pupils arising from new housing are likely to be in houses built in Broad Oak. The majority of new homes are likely to be in school admissions areas served by other schools. | Neutral     |

In any small community, the loss of one institution or business will be felt proportionately more than in a larger community and the closure of a school in a village community will undoubtedly impact. Good schools engage parents in their children's education and reach out to the wider community for support, as well as providing community facilities. However, these must be considered beneficial side-effects to the main duty of a school which is to provide a quality education to its pupils. Numbers on roll, budget deficits and quality of education must be the considerations in any decision on the future of a school and, while a community may be impacted by a decision to close this cannot be the overriding factor.

The DfE guidance refers to the fact that some schools may be a focal point for family and community activity, providing extended services for a range of users, and their closure may have wider social consequences. The DfE guidance states that '*Where the school is providing access to extended services, provision should be made for the pupils and their families to access similar services through their new schools or other means*'. Although the events and clubs that Broad Oak currently run would be discontinued if the school closes, other schools in the local area provide events, clubs and wrap around care for pupils.

### **References**

- [1] Sell, R., Leistriz, L. and Thompson, J. (1996) "Socio-economic impacts of schools consolidation on host and vacated communities". *Agriculture Economic Report No. 347*
- [2] Sustainable Education Review, The Impacts of School Closures Analysis Report, The Moray Council November 2014

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