

## Options for the future use of the existing Llanfair village school and its field.

### 1. Purpose

This report has been prepared to present options relating to potential future uses for the former Llanfair DC school: the building, its playground and playing field. The report is to enable the Community Council to discuss and consider the options for the future of the school and its grounds, to determine a preferred outcome put in place actions to achieve this. The site is shown in Figure 1.

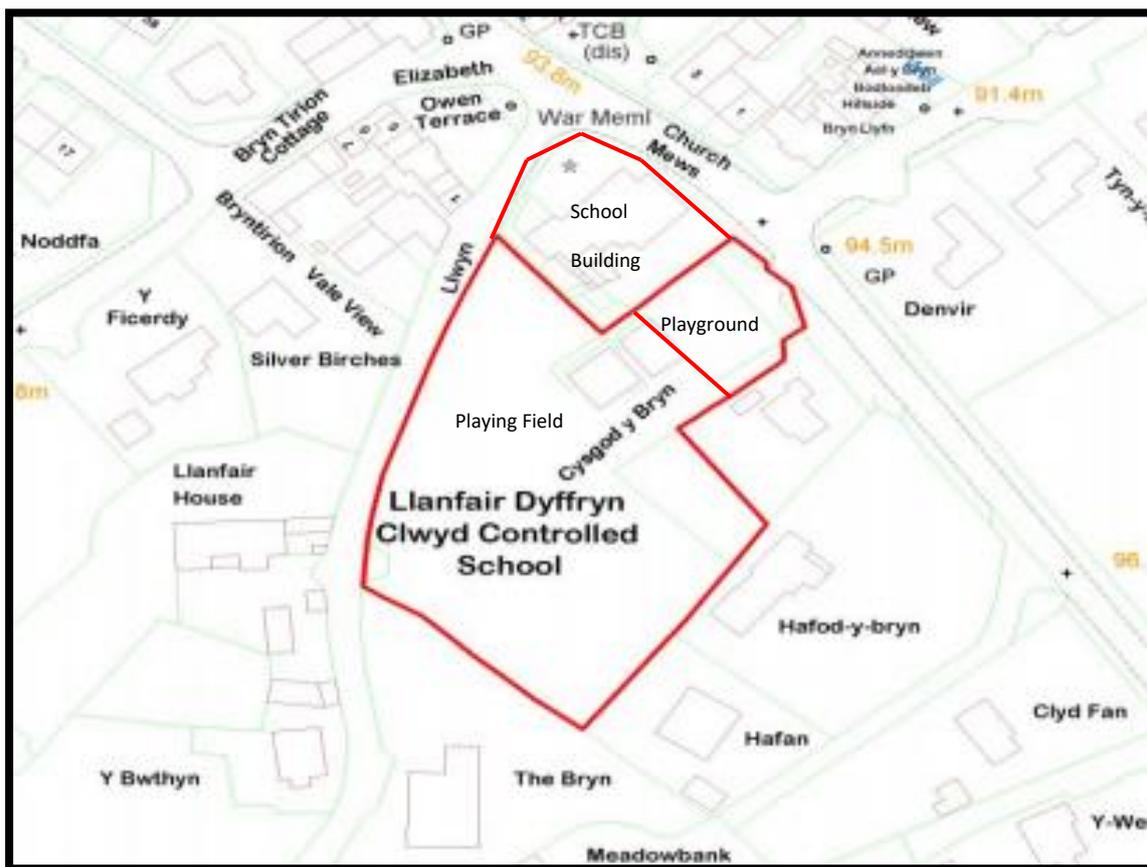


Figure 1 The former Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd School site.

### 2. History

Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd (DC)'s school was built in 1862. The school building has undergone some extension and development. The grounds which are to the side and rear comprise hard surfaced playground and a grassed playing field. Temporary classrooms were installed to accommodate additional pupils, but these are to be removed. Ownership of the school and its grounds is now with Denbighshire County Council with grounds having been transferred from the Church of Wales. The school has been replaced with a new school sited on Bron Y Clwyd. The old school became vacant in early 2020.

The former school has strong societal significance and has represented a focal point in the development of many people living in the area. It has historic significance and forms a key feature that comprises the sense of place in the village.

The existing school is a Grade 2 Listed Building and sits within the village Conservation Area. Its construction is in keeping with the other buildings: The Church, Alms Houses, the White Horse Public House and the adjacent houses.

Denbighshire County Council has reviewed its interest in future use of the school and has confirmed that it is surplus to its requirements. The school site was included in Denbighshire County Council's Local Development Plan as a Candidate site (CS-20E-169). Llanfair DC responded to the consultation on the candidate sites indicating its interest in determining the best future use for the site for the widest benefit to the community.

This note has been prepared in the context of the broader aims and objectives of the outcomes set out in Denbighshire County Council's Local Development Plan (2006 – 2022) and seeks to align outcomes with that plan. The Llanfair DC Neighbourhood Plan has direct reference to and alignment with both National and County objectives set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Discussions with Denbighshire County Council have indicated that it would be receptive to approaches to transfer assets using the Welsh Government's Community Asset Transfer guidance system. Documents have been provided by Denbighshire County Council's Asset Manager setting out the requirements for this. The process allows Community Councils to set out a case for the adoption of community assets. The Welsh Government recognises the importance of community assets and has a specific commitment *"to work with communities to help maintain local facilities that bring people together, ....., helping communities take ownership of assets in their local area when this is the best option."* The process is in three stages: the stage 1 pre-application expression of interest, the stage 2 expression of interest and stage 3 full application.

Denbighshire County Council's Asset Manager has stated that separate applications could be made for the former school building including its playground and for the playing field.

### 3. Requirements

The Community Council has developed a Neighbourhood Plan which provides a vision for the villages of Llanfair DC, Graigfechan and Pentrecelyn. Consultation was undertaken in early 2018 in the villages to consider the broader context of the communities and the aspirations for future facilities and this was led by the Neuadd Eleanor village hall management committee. This provided feedback on the community's needs and wishes and has been used as one source to consider how the existing school and its grounds could provide amenity for the future. The consultation feedback has been built into the Neighbourhood Plan which has been presented and adopted by the Community Council.

### 4. Alternatives

Feedback from the village community needs survey was that the existing school site and its grounds should be used for a purpose that would benefit the whole community. There could be potential for the school building to be converted to provide sheltered accommodation and possibly with a

communal area where residents from both the school and the adjacent alms houses could meet. If this option were to be taken forward a full survey of the fabric of the school would need to be carried out to identify what would be needed to preserve the fabric and enable conversion, bearing in mind modern regulations.

Other potential uses that have been suggested for the school include:

- Use of the school building (or a part of it) as a village shop. It has been suggested that the shop could be provided as an extension of the existing community owned shop in nearby Pwllglas.
- Use of the school building as a business incubator, similar to the Rhewl Technology Centre, where new start-up businesses can rent office space at an advantageous rate thereby stimulating the local economy.
- Creation of a Peace Garden in the school grounds. There are beautiful views from the grounds across the Vale and the Neighbourhood plan has identified the need for a respite area where people can seek peace and quiet.
- Provision of a children's play area; this would continue the use of the school grounds for the benefit of the children in the village. There is provision in the Neighbourhood plan for provision of play area on the nearby new housing development.
- Provision of an exercise trail on the school field with exercise apparatus.
- A related need identified in the Neighbourhood Plan has been for a cycling "pump track" to encourage development of riding skills.
- Provision of allotments or gardening-based activity.
- Affordable housing

#### 5. Other related considerations.

5.1 The Llanfair DC Community Council has been engaged with Grwp Cynefin concerning the future of the Elizabeth Owen Almshouses. The ownership and potential future management of the Almshouses is being considered and are presently (May 2020) awaiting further input before any decisions or actions can be taken. Future management options could usefully be integrated with the re-purposing of the former school building.

5.2 Proximity of the school site to the A525 and the junctions with Bron Y Clwyd and the Graigfechan Road present both opportunity and constraint on any development. Any development involving traffic movement would require consideration by the Highways division of Denbighshire County Council. Non-vehicular access to the site could potentially be considered along the existing bridleway which runs alongside the Almshouses and from which there is an existing field entrance. Parking may be able to be agreed at Neuadd Eleanor for people using the playing fields.

5.3 As a measure to assist in the wellbeing of residents of the area the provision of allotments has been suggested. There exists a group based in Graigfechan which forms a gardening cooperative and either this group or a new group could be formed to provide support to and enable a gardening-based facility. Examples from around the UK have shown the benefit that can arise from community based, safe, supportive working environment to nurture the physical and mental health of the community.

5.4 Llanfair DC has developed a biodiversity action plan which is incorporated into the Neighbourhood Plan. Working with organisations such as the North Wales Wildlife Trust, there is a

strong community-based aim to encourage developments that enhance the natural biodiversity of the area. Part of this includes consideration of how wildlife corridors can be encouraged to enable transfer of species across the Vale of Clwyd and between the formal and informal reserves in the area.

5.5 The villages are well provided for in terms of buildings for meeting places. The Neuadd Eleanor hall provides flexible accommodation for a range of community-based activities. There has recently been provision of a meeting room in the Church. Along with these the new School has a community room and the existing school at Pentrcelyn provides a potential meeting place. The churches and chapels in the area also serve as meeting places. Llysfasi College is also building a community room and the Genus Centre has been generous in allowing use of its premises for meetings. The public houses in the villages also provide meeting places.

5.6 Any proposal that is determined to be pursued would require to have a business case developed clearly showing the costs and benefits in the broad context. This should be presented as part of the business case for consideration and formal endorsement by the Llanfair DC Community Council. It is likely that any costs arising from the adoption of the school playing field would be small as most of the activity would be undertaken on a voluntary basis. However, there should be a full appraisal of the needs and a risk analysis presented. There could be a need to provide insurances. There could also be a need periodically to employ tree surgeons to undertake work on the large mature trees in the grounds. For the former school building and the playground, the costs and liabilities would be likely to be more complex but also dependent on the activity proposed and the ownership.

5.6 The Llanfair Community Council should encourage consideration of the various business models that could be adopted for bodies to be involved with or manage the assets for the future. These might include voluntary sector constitutions. The Llanfair DC Community Council needs to ensure that it has full awareness of the implications for involvement with or adoption of assets.

5.7 Denbighshire County Council's Local Development Plan report of July 2019 showed the need for housing of all types across the county and identified the need in broad terms across sub-regions. In the Ruthin and East area between 2018 and 2023 there was seen to be a need for 71 social houses and 26 intermediate, giving 97 in total. The report also identified the need to bring unused housing back into use and this formed the drive for discussion around the Elizabeth Owen Almshouses. The development of 63 new houses in Llanfair DC presented a range of housing with 2-bedroom bungalows, 2- & 3-bedroom townhouse style and semi-detached houses as well as 4-bedroom detached houses. These are priced from £185,000 upwards and may stimulate churn in house occupancy in the villages, releasing more affordable stock to meet needs.

5.8 There is a need to form a consensus view on the preferred use for any of the former school assets for the future and this will be crucial in making a case to the County Council for Transfer of that assets. It is suggested that as broad a section of views be collated to seize the opportunity that is presented to shape the use of these assets for the benefit of the community. Sitting in the Conservation Area there is a chance that would be unlikely to be repeated to bring about the vision expressed in the Neighbourhood Plan to create a sense of space in this unique setting.

#### 5.9 Funding and investment

Several avenues for grant aid support and investment opportunities exist to support the redesign and redevelopment of these sites. Robust business cases will be required to underpin any bid and

seed-corn funding is likely available to help with this. Early development of options will improve the funding prospects.

## 6. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Llanfair DC Community Council should discuss and agree on the future use of the school and its grounds.

- i) Llanfair DC Community Council should formally express an interest (pre-application) in the former School, its playground and playing field to Denbighshire County Council following the Welsh Government's framework for transfer of assets. These should be as two applications for i) the building and playground and ii) the playing field.
- ii) Llanfair DC Community Council should continue to hold discussions with relevant bodies with interests in the adjacent Alms houses to determine the best use of the former school building and its playground in line with the options set out in this report. This with a view to presenting a business case for their use.
- iii) That Llanfair DC Community Council should put in place measures to develop an application for the use of the former school playing field. Having expressed an interest in the site for the benefit of the community Llanfair DC Community Council should promote and support the Asset Transfer process for the playing field site. This would entail setting up a group with clear terms of reference for future use of the field in line with the needs identified in the Neighbourhood Plan. The group would report to the Community Council and would develop a plan to enable the second (expression of interest) and third stage (full application) of the Asset Transfer to take place.
- iv) Llanfair DC Community Council should include the strategy for the future development of the school and its playground in the Neighbourhood plan to advise policy and responses to any planning consultations.

## References:

DENBIGHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2006 – 2021, Adopted 4th June 2013

Llanfair DC Community Council response to Denbighshire County Council consultation on strategic housing sites CS-20E-169. July 2019

Llanfair DC Neighbourhood Plan v 5 December 2019

Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd Basic Services Feasibility Study, Cadwyn Clwyd, September 2018

Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd Biodiversity Action Plan - Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Part 1 - Section 6, The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty, Report 2019

Welsh Government, Ystadau Cymru, Community Asset Transfer

Denbighshire Local Housing Market Assessment, Strategic Planning and Housing, July 2019