School Transport from Upavon: Parental Choice and Access to Primary Education

I would like to bring to the attention of Upavon Parish Council an issue concerning Wiltshire Council's school transport arrangements for primary school children living in Upavon. Although my family's immediate circumstances have changed, I believe the underlying issue deserves consideration because it could affect other families in the village.

Our experience

Since July 2026, I have been trying to arrange school transport for my seven-year-old granddaughter to attend Pewsey Primary School. My granddaughter, her mother and father have been living with us in Upavon since April 2026.

When my daughter-in-law contacted Pewsey Primary School, she was advised that a place could be offered to my granddaughter. However, when we subsequently approached Wiltshire Council's School Transport Team to arrange transport from Upavon to Pewsey, our request was refused.

On investigating the matter, I discovered that Wiltshire Council recognises Rushall CofE Primary School and Netheravon All Saints Primary School as the designated primary schools for which transport arrangements are supported for children living in Upavon.

We have therefore been transporting our granddaughter to and from Pewsey ourselves since May 2026, accepting the additional time and inconvenience involved because we believe Pewsey Primary School is the right choice for her.

I initially pursued the matter with the intention of appealing the Council's decision. Paul Oatway was extremely helpful in explaining the process and assisting me towards an appeal. Unfortunately, due to serious personal circumstances, I had to withdraw from the appeal process.

My son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter have now found a house in Calne and expect to move shortly. Consequently, our immediate need for school transport will effectively disappear. However, this does not resolve the wider issue for other families in Upavon.

The underlying problem

The central concern is that the current arrangements can significantly restrict parental choice.

If a family in Upavon requires school transport, the Council's designated arrangements effectively limit its primary school options to Rushall CofE Primary School or Netheravon All Saints Primary School. Although Pewsey Primary School may be willing to offer a place, the lack of transport can make that option impractical for families who cannot provide their own daily transport.

This raises a reasonable question: should access to a particular primary school, where a place is available, depend so heavily on whether parents or grandparents can undertake the journey themselves?

I recognise that school transport is governed by Council policies and that not every school preference automatically creates an entitlement to free transport. Nevertheless, I believe it is reasonable to ask whether the existing arrangements remain appropriate for the needs of Upavon families today.

The historical decision of 2009

When I questioned Wiltshire Council about why Netheravon All Saints Primary School is included in the designated arrangements for Upavon, the School Transport Team provided the following explanation:

"This arrangement relates to an agreement made when the former Upavon Primary School closed in 2009. At that time, it was considered appropriate to include both Netheravon and Rushall Primary schools as designated primary schools for Upavon, to enable demand for spaces to be met between the two schools."

That explanation is understandable in the context of the closure of the former Upavon Primary School. However, the decision was made more than 17 years ago.

I believe it is reasonable for the Parish Council to ask whether an arrangement established in 2009 still reflects the educational choices, school admissions arrangements and transport needs of families living in Upavon in 2026.

A historical agreement should not necessarily remain unquestioned indefinitely. It would be helpful to establish whether the Council has reviewed this arrangement since 2009 and, if so, whether the current restrictions remain justified.

The inconsistency with secondary school transport

There is another aspect of the arrangements that I believe merits consideration.

When children from Upavon reach secondary school age, Pewsey Vale School is one of their secondary school options, and Wiltshire Council provides transport for eligible pupils travelling from Upavon.

This means that transport is available to Pewsey Vale School for secondary pupils, yet transport to Pewsey Primary School is not supported under the designated arrangements for primary pupils.

I appreciate that primary and secondary school transport policies may differ, and that eligibility depends on the relevant Council criteria. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to question why Pewsey is an accepted destination for eligible secondary pupils but is not similarly recognised as a designated primary school for children living in Upavon.

There is also a potential continuity issue. Netheravon All Saints Primary School is associated with the Avon Valley Academy in Durrington as a feeder school. However, Upavon is outside that secondary school's priority admission area, meaning children attending Netheravon may not necessarily progress to the local secondary school associated with their primary school. Some may instead attend Pewsey Vale School.

This does not mean that pupils from Netheravon cannot attend Avon Valley Academy, or that every child from Upavon will follow the same educational route. It does, however, highlight the need to consider primary school transport arrangements alongside the wider educational pathways available to local children.

I am not asking the Parish Council to intervene in my granddaughter’s individual case, which is now being resolved by my family’s forthcoming move, but parents who cannot provide their own transport could find that their practical choice of primary school is restricted, even where another school is willing to offer their child a place.

I therefore hope Upavon Parish Council will consider raising this matter with Wiltshire Council and seeking a clear explanation of the current policy, together with confirmation of whether the historic arrangement has been reviewed.

Bob McDonald