
Record of Public Meeting concerning proposed closure of Skelton Newby Hall CE VC Primary School held at the Reading Room, Skelton-on-Ure

Public Meeting held on 17 February 2022 at 6pm

Present: County Cllr Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, NYCC), Amanda Newbold, (Assistant Director Education and Skills), Howard Emmet (Assistant Director Strategic Resources), John Lee (Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC), Canon Richard Noake (Director of Education, CoE Diocese Leeds), Peter Cannings, (Chair of Governors, Federation of Skelton Newby Hall CE VC and Sharow CE VC), and Sue Turley (Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC).

Executive Headteacher Skelton Newby Hall CE and Sharow CE School, Chair of Parish Council, Skelton Cum Newby, County Councillor for Wathvale and Bishop Monkton division, and approximately 19 members of the public from the community.

Apologies: None noted

AGENDA

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting opens – brief welcome - Introduction to the Panel 	Peter Cannings – Chair of Governing Board
Executive Members Opening Remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short statement about the process 	County Cllr Annabel Wilkinson
Presentation	John Lee – Strategic Planning Officer NYCC
Question and Answer Session	Chaired by County Cllr Annabel Wilkinson
Meeting Close	County Cllr Annabel Wilkinson

1. Welcome

Chair of Governors Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow opening remarks

Peter Cannings, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the panel including Richard Noake and County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson who would be chairing the meeting.

Executive Member opening remarks

County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson introduced the meeting and said that it was an opportunity for the County Council to listen to people's comments and questions that would be included in the report to the Council's Executive.

2. Presentation from NYCC

John Lee Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC, explained that the meeting was being held to discuss the proposal to close Skelton Newby Hall CE VC Primary School from 31 August 2023.

John Lee provided a presentation which covered:

- The proposal
- Background to the proposal
- Pupil numbers
- Pupil recruitment efforts
- Finances
- School Leadership and Standards
- Impact on the Federation
- Local Schools
- Local Housing
- Catchment area
- Potential impact on secondary catchment areas
- School staff
- Federation Governing Body
- Diocese statement from Canon Richard Noake
- How can people comment

The slides explained the background to the closure proposal of falling rolls and the impact of this on maintaining quality and breadth of education for all year groups. The Governing Body had been active in their collective efforts to raise numbers at the school including the introduction of nursery provision in September 2019. Marketing of the school had also been a collective effort by governors, staff and parents though this has not had a long-term result.

The slides explained how falling pupil numbers formed one aspect of the background to the proposal and went on to explain that the school has a net capacity of 52 spaces. As of October 2021, there were 27 primary aged pupils living in the Skelton Newby Hall School catchment area and attending a North Yorkshire school – 6 of those attended Skelton Newby Hall School.

Numbers on roll have been reducing since 2017/18 and there are currently 4 pupils on roll and one in nursery. Due to low numbers, Key Stage 2 teaching is currently taking place at Sharow.

Skelton Newby Hall CE VC School currently operates a single budget as part of the federation with Sharow CE VC Primary and pupil numbers determine the funding for a school budget. The latest financial forecast for Skelton Newby Hall School indicated that the school would have an accumulated budget surplus position of £109.2k at the end of the financial year 2022/23, £94.1k at the end of the 2023/24 financial year and £55.6k at the end of the 2024/25 financial year. In-year budget deficits are forecast of £15.2k for the 2023/24 financial year and £38.5k for the 2024/25 financial year.

The budget figures for 22/23 were based on 11 pupils but clearly now there are only four pupils at the school, this position would worsen.

An Executive Headteacher leads both schools within the federation. The most recent full Ofsted inspection for Skelton Newby Hall CE VC was in March 2020. Overall effectiveness was judged to be 'Requires Improvement', as were the four key judgements on the quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management. Arrangements for safeguarding were judged to be effective.

Leaders and Governors have worked collectively to mitigate the impact of low numbers at Skelton Newby Hall CE VC and maximize the range of shared experiences with Sharow CE VC School. The Ofsted Inspection Framework places significant weight on curriculum provision. Delivering a curriculum that has 'breadth and ambition' is a particular challenge for a very small school.

Low pupil numbers at Skelton Newby Hall CE VC mean that even with the best endeavours of the school it is difficult to provide education of a high quality for all year groups, and to meet the expectations of the 2019 Ofsted Education Inspection Framework. This framework places significant weight on curriculum provision.

Sharow Primary CE VC School was last subject to a full Ofsted inspection in 2016 and judged to be 'Good' overall. An initial (section 8) inspection took place in December 2021.

Closure of Skelton Newby Hall CE VC School would dissolve the federation. The governing body may need to consider future arrangements for Sharow CE VC School should Skelton Newby Hall CE VC School close.

There are five neighbouring North Yorkshire primary schools within 4.5 miles of Skelton Newby Hall School: Kirby Hill (CE VC) Boroughbridge (Community); Roecliffe CE Academy, Dishforth Airfield Community Primary, Sharow (CE VC) federated with Skelton Newby Hall. Across the area there are places available for all pupils currently at the school. The pupil rolls and capacity information for all five schools is on the County Council's website.

At present, there is a discrete catchment area solely for Skelton Newby Hall CE VC School. It is proposed that Kirby Hill CE VC as the next nearest alternative school at 2.4 miles and which is also a CE school, would incorporate the existing Skelton Newby Hall catchment area as an addition to its existing catchment area in the event of a closure. The Church of England Diocese of Leeds has indicated early-stage support for this approach.

John Lee explained that views on this option, or other ideas for future catchment areas, should the school close, are being asked for as part of this consultation.

If Kirby Hill CE VC was to adopt the existing Skelton Newby Hall CE VC catchment area this would have implications on existing secondary catchment areas. The existing catchment area of Kirby Hill CE VC is in the Boroughbridge High secondary catchment area and the existing catchment area of Skelton Newby Hall CE VC is in the Ripon Grammar School /Outwood Academy Ripon catchment area.

Should Skelton Newby Hall CE VC close and the Kirby Hill CE VC catchment be extended, parts of the Kirby Hill primary school catchment areas would be split across two different secondary school catchments. Views on this are welcome and would be taken into account as part of the consultation process. Any proposed change could be consulted on as part of the Admissions Consultation Process for 2025/26

There is a parallel staff consultation process being undertaken.

In terms of Governance, John Lee explained that the federated governing body would remain in place during the consultation. In the event of closure, the federation would be dis-established, and a new governing body established for Sharow CE VC Primary from 1 September 2023.

The school buildings and the site are not owned by the County Council and it would be a matter for the owners to determine. Decisions about future use would be taken after determination of the closure proposal.

Richard Noake said he was representing the Diocese and that it was disappointing the meeting had been called under the circumstances presented. The school has been in existence since 1856. As a church school, Skelton Newby Hall requires the involvement of two statutory bodies, the County Council and the Diocese to consider a closure proposal, noting there is a Department for Education presumption against rural school closures.

Richard continued, noting that John Lee has outlined the challenges the school faced. Pupil numbers are key and drive the budget. With reducing rolls and only four pupils left at the school, it is challenging to provide quality provision across all year groups, the governing body had therefore reached the decision to ask the LA to consult on a school closure proposal.

Richard said that he had met with the Skelton Newby Hall Estate to discuss the potential school closure and consultation. The Estate currently leases the school to NYCC and are disappointed the school is in this position.

John Lee then outlined the consultation timescales and he emphasised that a two-stage consultation process would take place before any decisions on the proposals were taken. All views expressed at this public meeting would form part of the report which is considered when the decision on whether to proceed to the second statutory consultation is taken. The statutory consultation is a further 4-week period when there is opportunity for comments and responses.

John Lee stated the consultation runs until the 24 February 2023 and urged people to respond either online or by freepost. A report will be prepared and presented by Cllr Wilkinson to the Council's Executive on 21 March 2023.

John Lee then presented a slide with the details of the panel who would take questions from the audience:

Cllr Annabel Wilkinson – NYCC Executive Member

Canon Richard Noake – Diocesan Director of Education, Church of England Diocese of Leeds

Peter Cannings – Chair of Governors

Amanda Newbold – NYCC Assistant Director, Education and Skills

John Lee – NYCC Strategic Planning Officer

and he then handed over to Cllr Wilkinson who chaired the questions and answer session.

3. Q&A Session chaired by Cllr Wilkinson

A member of the public said they understood that the school's budget was difficult but the school is in an amazing location. Nationally, Lockdown has had a disastrous effect on children and they are still suffering. Children are taken by taxi all over the county and

there needs to be more joined up thinking and opportunities for pupils that have a greater need. There is the school building and outside space and access to the countryside. It is not good enough saying there are not enough children at the school. There needs to be a bigger wider plan.

Amanda Newbold responded saying use of specialist provision is something that the Council is reviewing and is keen to reduce transport costs. As regards the building, the County Council does not own the school site or building.

An ex-parent of the school said their child had started school and was very shy with additional needs and their local catchment village school (Kirby Hill) was felt to be too big which is why they chose Skelton Newby Hall School which is outstanding compared to other local schools. Skelton Newby Hall School managed the pandemic superbly well with small groups, whereas other local schools had overcrowded areas, so if you take out Skelton Newby Hall School, you will have overcrowding in others.

A Parent said her child had recently transferred from Skelton Newby Hall to Roecliffe Primary School and expressed concern they felt compelled to act due to the number of school places available at Roecliffe and did not want to miss out by applying later. The parent did not want to leave the school. They were aware that two other pupils had also left to go to Boroughbridge Primary School and Sharow School was at capacity. Concern was expressed about the impact of housing developments in the area including new builds (two bedrooms) which target young families. The parent was keen to understand the pupil forecasts with the number of planned housing developments in the locality. She said it is important to recognise the limitation of living in a small village, you can't just walk to other schools.

John Lee responded saying a pupil census takes place termly and that housing developments and pupil yields are monitored carefully but it is clearly a moving picture. He reiterated that there are places available in all the nearby schools (as per the local schools capacity slide), there was only one school where two of the year groups were at capacity. The County Council works with Harrogate Borough Council to obtain the latest details of planning permissions and anticipated pupil yields from housing developments and include these in our pupil forecasts.

Cllr Wilkinson said it was important to put concerns about housing developments and the impact on pupil forecasts and places in consultation responses.

A parent asked about reception places in September 2023 at nearby schools as they wanted their child to attend the same school as their siblings.

Amanda Newbold said we are not yet at the National offer date for reception pupils and the application would be considered for sibling priority.

A parent at the school asked what happens when all the new houses are built out, school places are taken and what about pupils who may have additional needs? Their child was thriving at Skelton Newby Hall School, the family had received little notice about the proposal and needed to act quickly to secure a place at a nearby school.

Amanda Newbold responded saying please contact the Admissions Team and that a preference exercise could be considered for those pupils currently on roll at the school to look at school choices and try and match parents/carers requirements.

John Lee confirmed the LA could look at a preference exercise for those pupils currently attending Skelton Newby Hall School.

Parish Council Chair said that the proposed closure and consultation had been discussed at a recent Parish Council meeting. The school was founded in 1856 and that there should be a long-term view taken as once the School is lost it will be lost forever. Growing up in the 70s he had experienced housing expansion and portacabins attached to schools as a response.

Skelton Newby Hall School is federated with a school more closely linked to Ripon than Boroughbridge and is the smaller school.

A forest-based learning would be a great facility, which could offer something different and could draw people to the school. Skelton Newby Hall School provides something different adjacent to the Skelton Newby Hall Estate.

Boroughbridge and Langthorpe will continue to grow and when we look back in 2026 it will not have been a good decision to close the school. Local developments are putting a squeeze on local school places.

There is a feeling that the focus from management has not been on Skelton Newby Hall School but Sharow where the school is delivering a 'good' education.

Ex Chair of Governors Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow, thought the consultation was a 'fait au complet' and that children are now being forced to apply for other schools and this will increase transportation costs. There is an 'ebb and flow' of pupils at the school and this should be taken into account.

Cllr Brown County Councillor said he had recently been elected and was here to listen this evening, his constituency covers Langthorpe, Sharow and Roecliffe they have good schools. Boroughbridge is expanding and not yet stopped. Given there has been a school here since 1856 this is a really important exercise to undertake. There were nine pupils at the start of September and now just four. Cllr Brown said there is a real passion in the community for the school to stay open and a former headteacher at a recent Council meeting had expressed concern at the proposed closure.

Cllr Brown asked what marketing had taken place to encourage the growth of pupils at the school?

The Chair of Governors Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools said that he had been appointed to improve governance under a fixed term agreement and that he does not have personal knowledge of the past but understands that a significant amount had been carried out in terms of marketing and locally advertising banners had been displayed.

Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools added that all the new builds in the area had flyers distributed. The school had also invested in drone footage which is available for perspective parents to view on the school's website. There had been a lot of recruitment activity.

Amanda Newbold explained that despite this, ultimately parental preference comes into play as a parent can choose any school.

Cllr Brown added that Boroughbridge is doubling in size and that the new settlement planned at Cattal and the surrounding area will also have secondary pupils feeding into Boroughbridge High School.

Cllr Brown asked to see the forecast for Boroughbridge Primary School.

John Lee explained that currently the pupil forecast for Boroughbridge Primary goes to 199 in 2027/28 (as detailed on the County Council's website) and additionally, predicting around 144 pupils to be generated from existing housing permissions but added if you currently live in Boroughbridge you would not expect your child to attend Skelton Newby Hall School unless you specifically chose that school.

Cllr Brown said a lot of pupils benefit from being educated in the countryside. The local schools are not quite at capacity but could be.

A former headteacher at the school had requested that a school remain in Skelton on Ure and that it should be given a budget for another year.

Cllr Annabel Wilkinson said the consultation was not a 'fait au complet' and urged people to respond to the consultation.

The Parish Council Chair said that the community had raised money for the local pub and that the village needed time to give the school an opportunity for growth. The village is active and there is a real strength of feeling a real passionate view that they can help support it.

A member of the public said it would be helpful to understand why the local community didn't support the school.

A member of the public who had lived in the village for 32 years echoed the passion for the school and community feelings. Roecliffe is a good school but not all the pupils there lived in the catchment area

Cllr Wilkinson replied saying Governors asked the County Council to consult on a proposed school closure.

Amanda Newbold said the number of pupils at the school drives the finances and governors have a responsibility for due diligence. The consultation does allow a genuine opportunity to respond to the closure proposal of the school.

A member of the community said someone had met recently with Julian Smith MP regarding the lack of school places in the area.

A member of the community said there is no KS2 provision at Skelton Newby Hall and there were 3 years with no pupils in reception class, there is parental choice but why have parents gone elsewhere?

Amanda Newbold encouraged people who don't use Skelton Newby Hall School to get in touch via the consultation to say why they have not considered the school.

Cllr Brown said he is keen on parental choice and asked what information parents receive if they move into the area and into one of the new builds.

Amanda Newbold responded saying there is Admissions information on every school in North Yorkshire on the County Council's website and that carers and parents can preference up to five primary schools.

A member of the public said she found it very concerning that pupils are already leaving the school this term to take up places at other schools before it is too late and places become unavailable.

Skelton Newby Hall Estate representative said it would be very sad to lose the school which has been virtually provided rent free with no profit from the Skelton Newby Hall

Estate and they will campaign against the school's closure. The capacity figures provided need to be more transparent with details of pupils entering at nursery and leaving. Is it not better to keep the school open rather than expand another school by putting a portacabin on it? This meeting has not told us the minimum number of pupils you require to keep the school open.

Amanda Newbold responded saying every school has individual operating costs and the needs of the children in the cohort have to be taken into account. There are examples of schools in North Yorkshire that run with small numbers and have nurseries.

Skelton Newby Hall Estate representative said all of the information surrounding this proposed school closure should have been made available at the same time, the Estate got to know before the Parish Council.

John Lee responded that all the supporting information about the school closure including numbers on roll and capacity at other local schools is available on the County Council's website.

A Governor at Kirby Hill Primary School said they had come to observe the meeting but wanted to add that Kirby Hill School was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in 2021 and is a lovely village school and in a beautiful rural setting and is comparable with Skelton Newby Hall School. Kirby Hill Primary School had grown year on year over the last 4 years, The capacity of the school is 150 pupils. The school is 20 years' old and well maintained. None of the class sizes are large and it is an excellent school.

A member of the public added that prior to Kirby Hill Primary School receiving a 'Good' Ofsted rating it was rated 'Requires Improvement'. Parking is an issue and more traffic is driving through the village.

A member of the public said they have lived in the village for over 20 years' and the school had its own Headteacher before federation in 2012. Initially there were good pupil numbers at the school reaching 50 but it feels now that the school is the poor relation in comparison to Sharow. Skelton Newby Hall was rated 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted and Sharow 'Good' but had a full inspection taken place this might not have been the case and the report cited staff absenteeism as one of the concerns. A further observation was put forward in relation to the federated governing body in that it did not include governors representing Skelton Newby Hall School.

The Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools replied saying the federated governing body had worked very hard to recruit governors from the Skelton Newby Hall School community.

The previous Chair of Governors Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools added that they did try to encourage villagers and parents to join but they didn't get engagement.

The Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools highlighted all governors work as a collective for the Federation not for one school.

A member of the public asked if leadership had been more concentrated at Sharow rather than Skelton Newby Hall and if that might explain only 27 attending the school (Oct 2021 census) and six pupils from the catchment area.

The Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools replied saying that was not the case and leadership is split equitably across the two schools and responds to needs as they arise.

Richard Noake explained further that even with 50 pupils the Skelton Newby Hall school would be unlikely to be able to support a separate headteacher and that moving to a federated model makes things more manageable, safeguarded the school and was the most sensible action to take. 35 pupils is around the number of pupils needed to partner with a larger school but you have to take into consideration other factors and it is a real struggle to recruit experienced, quality leaders like the existing Executive Head to manage more than one school. Ultimately parents have a choice where to send their children.

Amanda Newbold added we use the word 'leadership' deliberately as there are a number of leaders in any one school and it is not just the Headteacher.

Following some questions from the audience, a brief discussion took place about why schools become academies and it was pointed out that this is a government agenda and that becoming an academy is not a panacea.

A member of the Parish Council said that surely it would be cheaper to keep Skelton Newby Hall School open rather than build a new school in Boroughbridge?

A member of the public asked why the numbers at the school have been dropping and it seems that the Chair of Governors had no idea why this was the case.

The Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools said that the decline in numbers started sometime ago, it was not recent.

A former governor suggested the school seemed to have gained a reputation that it was a Special School and that a pupil needed an Education, health and care plan (EHCP) to attend.

The Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools said it becomes difficult for any child when there no other children in the cohort.

A member of the public asked how many leaflets drops to the new housing developments were made?

The Executive Headteacher Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools said she was not sure of the exact number but an extensive leaflet drop had been carried out.

A member of the public said that 4k leaflets were distributed regarding shares in the pub.

Cllr Wilkinson thanked everyone for their attendance at the meeting and said that the meeting would now close.

At this point a number of further comments/concerns were raised from the audience

A member of the public asked what were the reasons for the decline in numbers and that they felt this question remained unanswered also why had the current Chair of Governors been drafted into support the school?

The Chair of Governors Federation of Skelton Newby Hall and Sharow CE Primary Schools said he did not know why pupil numbers had dropped and that he had been

recruited to the role of Chair of Governors to improve governance due to past knowledge and experience, but the proposed school closure was now absorbing his time.

Cllr Wilkinson closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance and said input and comments would be included in the note of the meeting and in the report to the Executive.

The **meeting closed** at 19:40