


# SKELTON CUM NEWBY PARISH COUNCIL



**Skelton Newby Hall**  
CHURCH OF ENGLAND SCHOOL  
North Yorkshire



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## **Sustainable Future Plan for Skelton Newby Hall Primary School in response to the North Yorkshire Council consultation on the closure of the school, and the consultation on the proposed change to the school catchment**

**April 2023**

### **Introduction**

Skelton Newby Hall Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School (URN 121589) was founded in 1856 and became part of a federation with Sharow Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School (URN 121588) on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012.

The pupil roll at Skelton rose to over 50 in 2015 and then declined until the remaining pupils were advised to move at the start of the 2022/23 school year. The governors of the federation, with no representation from the Skelton community, requested that Skelton Newby Hall Primary School be considered for closure and a formal consultation was started by North Yorkshire County Council (now NYC) on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023. In the event the closure of the school is confirmed, the school will close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023.

### **Current state of Skelton Newby Hall Primary School**

The lack of pupil demand is not organic but a consequence of the failure of the leadership and management of the federation. There has been no marketing to the local area, including the 800 new homes being built within five miles of the school. Local parents have also removed their children due to concerns, and other prospective parents were left underwhelmed when they enquired about their children joining the school. Latterly, there has been a managed dispersal of the pupils into other local schools.

The lead school of the federation in Sharow has recently been downgraded to 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted (visited 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023, published 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) with 50% of the categories marked as 'Requires Improvement', including leadership and management. The previous s8 inspection in December 2021 noted concerns around staff absenteeism and bullying at the school. The last inspection by Ofsted (visited 5/6<sup>th</sup> March 2020, published 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020) at Skelton Newby Hall was also graded 'Requires Improvement' across all categories.

Skelton cum Newby Parish Council has made a FOI request to the federation to see copies of the minutes relating to the meetings convened to discuss Skelton Newby Hall school's future and the recommendation to request the closure of the school. Sharow school has refused the request and the Parish Council has requested an internal review. This obstruction of public transparency has raised questions in the community about how the decision was reached and whether it was based on a unanimous decision, as stated, and taken at a meeting of the federation's Governors.

### **Government Policy**

On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019 there was a debate in parliament on Small and Village School Funding (*source Hansard Volume 663*), which followed research led by Rt Hon. Neil O'Brien MP (Con). He noted the significant decline in small primary schools from 11,464 in 1980 to 5,406 in 2018 with the growth of 'super jumbo' primary schools. Academically schools with less than 100 pupils are more likely than average to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. Indeed only 8% are not in these two categories, compared to 15% in towns and cities. Yet since 2010, 61% of schools which have closed have been rural schools meaning rural schools have been twice as likely to shut as urban ones.

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In the same debate, Rt Hon. Gillian Keegan MP (Con), now the Secretary of State for Education, said, "These schools are the beating heart of communities up and down the country. They offer the best education to young children, and they are the centre of all kinds of community activities. They ensure that our precious village life is maintained".

Neil O'Brien concluded the debate, "Small schools and village schools are an important part of the fabric that makes up this country ... I genuinely think that if we continue to lose those schools at the rate we have seen in recent decades, in my lifetime, we will be losing an important part of this country".

In the statutory guidance issued by the Department of Education in January 2023, applying to schools in England, it states that, "Proposers should be aware that the department expects all decision makers to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area."

## North Yorkshire Council's Consultation Position

The two key concerns to support the case for closure, cited by the new unitary authority are :-

1. Falling roll
2. Maintaining the quality and breadth of education for all year groups

NYC also states there is sufficient capacity in the area to meet both the current and future primary school capacity requirements.

Furthermore, NYC proposes, in the event of closure, to move the current school catchment area into the Kirby Hill CE VC Primary School catchment.

## Skelton Community Response

The response to the first phase of the statutory consultation was overwhelmingly clear. 46 out of the 50 registered responses were against the closure of the school. The Parish Council and the Newby Estate (school landlord) have also opposed the closure. The community is also strongly supported by their North Yorkshire Council representative, Cllr Nick Brown.

The MP for Skipton & Ripon, Rt Hon. Julian Smith MP, has also written on 5<sup>th</sup> April to the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon. Gillian Keegan MP, to raise the concern around the closure of rural schools, which was raised by Conservative MPs when the Government first announced in 2016 an acceleration of the conversion of maintained schools into Multi Academy Trusts (MATs).

**The community does not believe that the proposal to close Skelton Newby Hall Primary School meets the threshold for closure of a rural school set out by the Department of Education, as there is not sufficient pupil capacity in the area, as a standalone school it could be strong and viable, and the quality of education provision would be impacted by its loss.** The community is therefore proposing a Sustainable Future Plan, which would also retain its position in the catchment for Ripon Grammar School.

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## Sustainable Future Plan

In preparing this plan the community has established an advisory group consisting of two retired headteachers, one current (Ofsted outstanding) primary school headteacher, a parent representative of a recent pupil, and two members of the Parish Council; all of whom live in the village.

We have also consulted with a forest school provider, as well as with other primary schools and councils in the area.

## The Need

We have identified there is already a shortage of capacity in the area with more demand to be met from the new housing developments which are still being built, as well as further developments with planning. These new houses are predominantly marketed by the developers to young families, and therefore likely to increase the usual formula of one child per four houses.

Roecliffe Primary School has a waiting list for demand in the early years department, which was only introduced a few years ago by the current Headteacher. This has restricted the flow of pupils up the age groups.

Boroughbridge Community Primary School has a stated capacity in the consultation document of 252 and a current pupil roll of 184. The reality is quite different. The available capacity is c230 and the current roll has already exceeded 220. Whilst the school's catchment is a one-mile radius, it is having to absorb arrivals from the new housing in the area as well as displaced pupils from Skelton.

We believe that the current and projected need in the area with the increase in housing stock, both currently under construction and further planned construction, will ensure that there is a sustained need for capacity in the area, which a quality existing setting such as Skelton Newby Hall Primary School can help to meet. This need may not have been as apparent to NYC in the past, as the planning of housing developments was controlled at a district council level.

We believe this capacity need, which has already exceeded the projections in the consultation document, means that the government's threshold for the closure of a rural school, such as Skelton Newby Hall, cannot be met as a lack of capacity would not be in the best interests of education provision in the area.

## Compare & Contrast

If we compare two villages of a similar character in this area, Skelton and Roecliffe, we can better understand that Skelton is a viable setting. Skelton has a population of 361 (2021 census) and Roecliffe has a population of 219. Skelton has 3.5x the number of under 10 year olds.

The school site in Skelton is 1.5 acres, Roecliffe's site is less than a quarter of the size with limited amenity space. There are though two notable differences which currently favour Roecliffe Primary School. Firstly, the Roecliffe building can hold a capacity of 75 pupils compared to 50 pupils at Skelton. Secondly, the high quality of leadership & management at Roecliffe attracts a significant number of pupils from outside this small village.

The following plan will address these points and further demonstrate that Skelton Newby Hall Primary School should be retained as it has as much, if not more, potential than Roecliffe as a setting and is needed to protect the quality of education provision in the area.

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## The Plan

The Skelton Newby Hall site has the following characteristics which make it one of the highest quality sites in the area (also see Appendix A).

- A 1.5 acre site in the beautiful adjacent to the Grade II listed entrance to the Newby Estate.
- In excess of an acre of amenity space
- A forest school setting, with pond and willow shelters for outdoor learning
- A newly installed playground with climbing rock
- A forest school early years classroom facing onto woodland
- A newly installed safe drop off car park
- A low cost setting, site owned by Newby Hall. An existing budget surplus of £100k
- Full integration and support with local community, Newby Hall Estate and the Parish Council

We believe it is possible to develop the school capacity beyond the existing capacity of 50 pupils. We have available viable short-term ways to increase the capacity to 75 by using existing secure space (the village Reading Room), which has previously been used by the school, and there is also space on the site for future development in partnership with North Yorkshire Council and the landlord.

We have identified and are ready to work with a leading provider of forest schools to develop our forest school plan as this setting offers the best opportunity in the area to provide an in-setting integrated forest school provision.

The school currently lacks ambition and leadership. This school can have a viable and valuable future as a stand alone maintained primary school.

To better understand the potential of this school, you need to look no further than these two extracts from the April 2008 Ofsted report. The school had 37 pupils on the roll, which was before the additional classroom capacity was added. Mr Peter Pozman was the last headteacher of Skelton Newby Hall School (retired 2011).

*“This is a good school, which is thriving because it is well led and managed. The headteacher's passionate belief in the value of learning and playing outdoors is reflected in pupils' outstanding awareness of the importance of staying fit and healthy. Playtimes promote this awareness and are lively, energetic occasions where often the whole school joins together to play one large game such as skipping or 'dodge ball'. Year 6 pupils keep an eye on younger ones and the result is exuberant play and happy, healthy youngsters who return to lessons with renewed vigour. Pupils agree, 'It's a really good school. It feels like home. We know where everything is and what's going to happen.' Consequently, they behave well, feel safe and know who to turn to should they need help. Their personal development is good and they are given good guidance and support which helps them to work and play cooperatively and respect the needs of others.”*

*“The school's self-evaluation is very accurate. Despite having a heavy teaching commitment, the headteacher leads and manages the school well. He clearly directs improvement and promotes the well-being of learners through good quality care and education. The school's work is checked both formally and informally and the small team of teachers work closely and efficiently together. Links with other local schools successfully extends what the school can provide and ensures that pupils have a wide circle of friends of their own age. The governing body plays an active part in supporting the school's drive for higher standards. One result of this dynamic partnership is an innovative planning document, which takes the Every Child Matters agenda as its basis and includes aspirations for the future. Consequently, the pace of change has quickened, pupil numbers have increased and the school has a deservedly good reputation locally.”*

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## Catchment Area

Following our recommendation that the best route to maintain the quality of education provision in the area is to not close Skelton Newby Hall Primary School, we also propose retaining the school's existing catchment area which also allows the school to remain in the Ripon Grammar School catchment. It has been noted previously by NYC that the school catchment area does not limit applications to the school from any residents who live outside the current school catchment area and would only become a potential issue if there was competition for places in the future.

## Conclusion

We are confident that with the committed support from the local community and the new North Yorkshire Council, this school, with its ambition & leadership restored, can once again provide a valuable contribution to the education provision in the area.

We can only achieve this by working in partnership with North Yorkshire Council. The new unitary Council has a clear stated aim, "Local at its heart ... We will work closely with town and parish councils ... to ensure that local priorities drive locally led decision-making and local action" (source various inc. North Yorkshire Council launch campaign: Parish and Town Councils Communications Pack March 2023).

When it comes to delivering the Sustainable Future Plan for Skelton Newby Hall Primary School, we recognise whilst we hold the formula, NYC holds the calculator. **Working together this setting can thrive, not just survive, and protect the quality of education provision in this corner of North Yorkshire.**

*Minister for School Standards, Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP (Con)*

***"The Government recognise the importance of rural schools and the need to maintain access to good local schools in rural areas which are so often at the heart of their communities ...***

***Our rural communities are part of the historic fabric of this country, and the schools that serve them are fulfilling a vital and valued service both locally and nationally. I believe by **working closely together**, we can make sure we deliver on our ambition to give every child a world-class education, wherever they live".***

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## Appendix A - Site Plan for Skelton Newby Hall Primary School

Site Plan – Overview of school setting next to Newby Hall



Site Plan – Key elements of the 1.5 acre site

