

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **THE EXECUTIVE**

**7 May 2024**

### **PROPOSAL TO CEASE TO MAINTAIN ST HILDA'S AMPLEFORTH CHURCH OF ENGLAND (VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED) PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**Report by the Corporate Director – Children and Young  
People's Service**

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report details the outcomes of the public consultation carried out by the Council on the proposal to close St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School and asks the Executive to authorise the publication of proposals and statutory notices, and to schedule taking a final decision on the proposal on 16 July 2024.

#### **2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

2.1 At the meeting of the Governing Board of St Hilda's Ampleforth Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School on 17 January 2024 it was reluctantly resolved, following a full discussion about pupil numbers, financial prospects and future sources of leadership, to invite North Yorkshire Council to commence a consultation on closure of this school.

2.2 This report details the responses to this consultation and asks the Executive to authorise the publication of statutory proposals and notices, and to schedule taking a final decision on the proposal on 16 July 2024. If approved, the school would close on 31 August 2024.

2.3 The report is supported by a number of Appendices as listed below:

Appendix 1: Full draft Statutory Proposals and draft Statutory Notice

Appendix 2: Published Consultation Paper

Appendix 3: List of the Consultees

Appendix 4: Note of the Public Meeting

Appendix 5: Consultation Responses

Appendix 6: Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 7: Climate Change Impact Assessment

#### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School is located in the rural village of Ampleforth. Ampleforth village lies partially within the North York Moors National

Park and partially in the Howardian Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The school is defined by the government as a rural school that serves a rural village. The Department for Education expects all decision makers to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. However, in their statutory guidance they make it clear that 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. The school was previously in a Federation with Hovingham CE VC Primary School from April 2015 until Hovingham's closure in March 2023.

- 3.2 In January 2024 Governors brought forward a proposal to consult on the closure due to low pupil numbers and an expected Reception intake of 0 (zero) pupils in September 2024 leading to a decline in the overall number on roll. This has led to financial pressures, meaning that the school will have an in-year deficit in 2024/25 and a cumulative deficit by 2025/26. The school's current leadership arrangement with leadership being provided by the Arete Learning Trust (formerly Ryedale Learning Trust) is only in place until the end of the summer term 2024. Governors have requested the consultation at this time as they have identified the importance of a decision on the school's future being made before the end of this academic year.

#### **4.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES**

- 4.1 The decision to consult on the proposal was taken by the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills on the 20 February 2024.
- 4.2 A consultation paper setting out the proposal was sent to staff of the school as well as other interested parties and individuals. A copy of the consultation paper is attached as Appendix 2 together with a list of the consultees at Appendix 3.
- 4.3 The consultation period ran from 1 March to 19 April 2024. A public meeting was held on 18 March and was attended by officers of the Council, the Diocesan Director of Education, Governors, a number of parents, members of the local community and other local stakeholders. A record of that meeting is attached as Appendix 4.
- 4.4 By the closing date of the consultation, 80 consultation responses had been received to the proposals, three of the 80 respondents did not leave any comments, so their comments (supportive or otherwise) cannot be taken into account. Consultation responses are shown at Appendix 5.
- 4.5 The following section of the report summarises the main issues raised by individuals who completed the online response form or submitted a written response to the consultation. It also summarises the issues raised at the public meeting on 18 March 2024.

#### **5.0 ISSUES RAISED AND RESPONSES**

- 5.1 The majority of the responses to the consultation were not supportive of the proposal. A number of attendees expressed their views at the public meeting and saw the closure as a negative proposal. The comments against the proposal focused on number of issues for example that there was still a need for the school locally and this was very important to the local community. A number of respondents felt that the school met a particular need within the village that they did not think could be met by the local Catholic primary school. A number of responses saw the proposal as short sighted and that there will be enough pupils to make the school viable if it were left open. The school's parents' association *Friends of St Hilda's* (FOSH) submitted a document making their case against closure as part of the consultation. This document references a variety of issues and in particular focuses on the presumption against closure of rural schools and cites their reasons against the closure in the context of this presumption.
- 5.2 However, a few of the 80 respondents expressed the view that the school wasn't viable and that it should close.
- 5.3 Appendix 5 includes all responses to the consultation reproduced in full for consideration by Members. The key issues raised during the consultation process are listed below alongside relevant responses.
- 5.4. Additional Housing in the Local Area  
Several responses expressed the view that housing growth within Ampleforth would lead to further demand for primary school places locally and that this supported the need for St Hilda's CE VC Primary School to remain open. Some responses made reference to Ampleforth being designated as a 'Service Village' within the 2013-2027 Ryedale District Council Local Plan. Responses argued that this designation was linked to the services available in the village and in particular the presence of a primary school. One response highlighted the intention in the Ryedale Local Plan for 10% of houses to be delivered in service villages. Responses also highlighted that the potential need for additional primary provision in Ampleforth was referenced within the Local Plan.

#### Response

The Ryedale Local Plan was adopted in 2013 and in it Ampleforth was designated as a Service Village. This took account of the size of the village and the services available therein. The plan set out that up to 10% of housing allocations within the plan would be spread between the service villages. At this point references were made to the potential need for expansion in any service villages where housing could be directed. At this time there was some surplus capacity at St Hilda's CE VC Primary, though St Benedict's Catholic Primary was operating above their Net Capacity. At this time it was unknown how much housing may be allocated to Ampleforth. In June 2019 Ryedale District Council finalised their site allocations for the 2013-2027 Local Plan and no allocation was made for housing in Ampleforth. Since 2013, 41 new properties have been built within Ampleforth (excluding the National Park) and using expected pupil yield this could have been expected to bring the need for

up to 10 additional primary school places. However, across the period of 2012 to 2024 the combined roll of the two primary schools in the village has fallen from 128 to 87. As a new local plan for North Yorkshire is developed and education officers will work alongside colleagues in planning to ensure that developments are sustainable.

#### 5.5 Leadership

A number of responses commented that they believe that previous leadership of the school had been poor and that this had played a part in lower numbers at the school. Some responses argued that with good leadership there would be more confidence within the local area to send pupils to the school.

#### Response

Since 2011 there have been three Ofsted Inspections and each of them have judged Leadership and Management of the School to be 'Good'. The last Ofsted inspection was made in March 2020.

#### 5.6 Capacity in New Catchment Schools

A number of responses argued that the availability of places in the proposed catchment schools were insufficient to meet the needs of the community. Others argued that the quality of provision at the other schools were not as high as at St Hilda's CE VC Primary and therefore they did not think the alternative schools available were appropriate.

#### Response

There are currently 13 pupils at St Hilda's CE VC Primary and there are projected to be 10 pupils in need of an alternative school place for September 2024, if St Hilda's closes. The combined number of available spaces (against Net Capacity) at the three proposed catchment schools of Helmsley Community Primary School, Terrington CE VA Primary School and Husthwaite CE VC Primary School is 100, plus there are 31 places at St Benedict's which is also located in Ampleforth. There are places available in local schools all year groups, however some of the schools are operating as or above PAN in some year groups, as can be seen in the consultation appendix 2.<sup>1</sup> This information was accurate in January 2024, if the decision is made to proceed with the statutory notices and proposed closure, Council Officers will work with parents and families to identify spaces for their children. Helmsley Community Primary School, Terrington CE VA Primary School and St Benedict's Catholic Primary School have been inspected during this academic year and they are all judged to be 'Good' schools. While Husthwaite CE VC Primary School was inspected in 2022 and judged to 'Require Improvement', a monitoring inspection in November 2023 stated that 'Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to become good.'

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/your-council/consultations-and-engagement/current-consultations/proposal-close-st-hildas-ampleforth-church-england-voluntary-controlled-primary-school/proposal-close-st-hildas-ampleforth-consultation-appendix-2-indicative-table-primary-school-places>

### 5.7 Importance of the School to the Community

A number of responses referenced the importance of the school to the community. Some responses referenced that the school has been in the village since the Victorian era and others referenced generations of families attending the school. The loss of the asset itself and also the loss of focus that community members feel that the school provides were also mentioned.

#### Response

The responses received clearly demonstrate the strength of feeling from some members of the community about the importance of the school to the local area. In some villages the school itself may be the only building large enough to facilitate community gatherings however, in the case of Ampleforth there is a village hall and a church hall associated with the Catholic church, both of which are available for hire. In addition to St Hilda's CE VC Primary School there is, and in the event of closure, would remain another primary school within the village. There is currently no community use of the St Hilda's school site beyond the core educational use by the school. Whilst the school is clearly valued strongly by respondents to the consultation, of the 94 pupils living within the catchment area only 13 are attending St Hilda's CE VC Primary with parental preference for St Benedict's significantly outnumbering preference for St Hilda's in all year groups.

### 5.8 Consultation Meeting

Some responses felt that the presentations by North Yorkshire Council representatives at the consultation meeting suggested that the decision has already be predetermined, and that the panel should be making a case for keeping the school rather than just the closure.

#### Response

The presentation given at the consultation meeting set out the roles and responsibilities for the Governing Board, Council Officers and Members. The proposal to consult on the closure of the school was initiated when the Governing Board reluctantly resolved, following a full discussion about pupil numbers, financial prospects and future sources of leadership, to invite North Yorkshire Council to commence a consultation on closure of this school. This consultation was approved on 20 February 2024 by Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills. Officers prepare the reports and make a recommendation based on the available information, but the Executive of North Yorkshire Council is then the decision maker. Cllr Wilkinson is a member of the Executive and attends the consultation meeting to listen to the views of the community.

### 5.9 Religious Character of Education Provision

The religious character of the two primary schools within Ampleforth was one of the most widely commented upon aspects of the closure proposal. There were a variety of different views on this within the comments and raised verbally at the consultation meeting. Some parents felt that attending St

Benedict's was not an appropriate option for their children. Some responses felt that the presence of two primary schools within the village was important to serve both perceived communities whilst others disagreed. Other responses felt that the faith element should be removed from education and that Ampleforth would be best served by a single non-faith school.

#### Response

The educational landscape of North Yorkshire and indeed the whole country includes a variety of types of educational settings and some of these have a religious character. Ampleforth has historically had two state-funded schools, one with a Church of England designation and one with a Roman Catholic designation. Since the Schools Standard and Frameworks Act 1998 parental preference has played an increasing role in the selection of school for children to attend. This is well illustrated by the current schools attended by pupils living within the catchment area of St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School of the 94 attending North Yorkshire Schools: 12 are attending St Hilda's CE, 55 St Benedict's Catholic Primary, 17 children attend other local schools with no religious character and 7 attend other local schools with a CE designation. Parents are likely to have expressed a preference for these schools for a wide variety of reasons. In selecting the proposed catchment areas of schools, should St Hilda's close, council officers have been mindful of the fact that it is not typical within North Yorkshire for Catholic primary schools to have a catchment area. For pupils living in the parishes of Gilling East, Grimstone, Cawton, Coulton, Byland with Wass and Ampleforth the proposal maintains the status quo of their catchment school being their nearest Church of England Primary school either Husthwaite CE or Terrington CE. For the parishes of Oswaldkirk and Stonegrave it was felt that the proximity of those parishes to Helmsley made Helmsley CP the natural choice for future catchment school.

#### 5.10 Effect on Local Wrap Around Provision

Some responses to the consultation commented on the close working relationships between the primary schools within the village and Daisy Daycare, a local provider of early years provision and wraparound care. This provision is clearly valued locally, and the responses expressed concern that if pupils did end up leaving Ampleforth for their education then this would have a detrimental effect on the wraparound provision.

#### Response

Whilst this concern is noted officers are aware that Daisy Daycare also provide wraparound provision for St Benedict's Catholic Primary School and so any future pupils whose parents chose St Benedict's over another local option would still be able to utilise Daisy Daycare. Other local schools do also offer some wraparound care which is discussed in greater detail below.

#### 5.11 Effect on pupils

Some responses referenced that closing the school would have a negative impact upon the current pupils of the school. One response commented that

their child had been moved to St Hilda's CE VC Primary School from another local school and that it would negatively affect them to move schools again. Some responses suggested that children at St Hilda's CE VC Primary are enjoying their education at the school and shouldn't be moved.

#### Response

It is acknowledged that if the proposal goes ahead there will be some disruption to pupils, although schools and the Council will work hard to minimise this. A preferencing exercise is underway so that parents can express a preference for where pupils would go in the event that the school closes. If the decision is taken to publish statutory notices for closure then the Council will support parents through the continuation of this process.

#### 5.12 Environmental Issues

Some responses argued that the close of St Hilda's CE VC Primary School would cause additional journeys to schools which would create additional CO2 emissions. The response from the Friends of St Hilda's School estimated that even one additional journey would cause ~0.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. The group argued that this is not compatible with NYC declaration of a climate emergency and plans statement that '*we continue to look for opportunities within our carbon reduction plan to meet our targets*'.

#### Response

It is challenging to ascertain the degree to which this proposal will cause an increase in journeys and mileage of those journeys. Some of the pupils that have attended St Hilda's CE VC Primary historically will have travelled by car and this is particularly true for pupils attending from outside the catchment area. The nature of parental preference and the choice of method to get to school including taking account of any lift sharing is also difficult to account for. If the 10 pupils currently projected to be on roll at September 2024 at St Hilda's CE VC Primary went to the nearest school to their home following the closure then 8 of them would likely be within the statutory walking distance to that school. If all parents chose to send their children to schools further afield then this would likely increase emissions from transport associated with this cohort. However, it must also be acknowledged that maintaining a school itself has an impact on energy and resource usage and therefore carbon usage, emissions and climate change. At present the school is operating and being heated and powered for 13 statutory school age pupils when the building itself could accommodate more pupils. This is not an efficient use of energy. Whichever schools the pupils subsequently attend would likely have a negligible increase in energy usage associated with the pupils joining compared to the significant reduction in energy usage from the school ceasing to operate. A Climate Change Impact Assessment forms Appendix 7 of this report and addresses the issue in further detail.

#### 5.13 Future of Site

Responses raised some queries and concerns about the future of the site. A view was expressed that if the school site closes it would likely be converted to

a housing site which would cause an increase in the need for school places. Another response suggested that if the school does shut then St Benedict's Catholic Primary School should occupy both their current site and the St Hilda's CE Primary site to make use of the facilities.

#### Response

This feedback is noted and the future use of the site would be a decision to be taken following the closure if the closure proceeds. Future use of the site is not a factor in the decision over whether the school closes. The site is partly owned by North Yorkshire Council and partly by the Diocese of York.

#### 5.14 Educational Standards

A large number of responses shared a view that the school is a very good school and that the education it provides both academically and pastorally is well valued. Attendees at the consultation meeting described with passion the high regard in which the school is held and the successes that its current and former pupils had. The teachers at the school were complimented for their hard work and dedication to providing a good standard of education.

#### Response

The reason for this closure proposal being brought forward are predominantly due to low pupil numbers and the financial issues that this creates for the school going forward, and not the standard of education being provided by the school. However, it has been noted by Council officers that as pupil numbers fall very low it becomes increasingly difficult to provide certain aspects of the curriculum.

#### 5.15 Inclusivity of School

A number of responses and attendees at the public meeting referenced that St Hilda's CE VC Primary School is well regarded for the education that it provides for pupils with Special Education Needs. Many responses felt that pupils with SEN were particularly well supported at the school, and it was reflected that smaller group sizes were a benefit in this regard. Parents provided views that their children with SEN had had good outcomes at the school and a view was expressed that they may not have had those outcomes if the school wasn't available.

#### Response

It is acknowledged that the school is held in high regard for the support it provides to pupils with Special Educational Needs. If the school does close then the Council will support parents to ensure the best possible outcomes for their children. All schools have a responsibility to ensure that children with special educational needs through SEN Support or via an Education Health and Care plans receive the education that they require.

#### 5.16 Need for Places



One of the most common views expressed in consultation responses and at the meeting was that there is a need for the school places which St Hilda's CE VC Primary provides. Respondents argued that the current low numbers are a small blip in the requirement for places in the local area. A particular view expressed was that the Council had not taken adequate account of future increases in pupil numbers. Some responses felt that COVID had contributed to this downturn in numbers and that the Council was being short sighted in closing the school.

### Response

The response regarding the capacity of other local schools demonstrates that from the perspective of needing to maintain a sufficiency of school places St Hilda's CE VC Primary School is not required. There is a surplus of places both within the village and across the wider area even if the capacity of St Hilda's is removed.

Whilst it is true that the number of births in the former Ryedale district fell from 460 in 2019 to 412 in both 2020 and 2021, it is not considered that the effect of COVID 19 has been a significant factor in the school becoming unviable. The underlying birth rate has not been as significant a factor as the pattern of parental preference over a number of years. As an example, the current Reception cohort was born prior to the pandemic and of 10 pupils of that age group only 1 is currently attending St Hilda's CE VC Primary School. Across the school only 13% of pupils living within the St Hilda's catchment area and attending a North Yorkshire school are attending St Hilda's CE VC Primary School.

Some responses made reference to numbers at the school previously being higher and that numbers may rise again in future. Using the most recent peak in numbers during the 2018/19 academic year as an example there were at that point 36 pupils on roll of statutory school age at St Hilda's. At the same time, in addition to the 13 surplus places at St Hilda's CE VC Primary, there were 46 surplus places at St Benedict's Catholic Primary School and a further 126 surplus places in the surrounding proposed catchment schools. This highlights again the impact that parental preference plays in the rise and fall of numbers on roll. Even when there have been higher numbers of pupils on roll at St Hilda's CE VC Primary School it has largely been dictated by changes in preference locally rather than an underlying demographic change.

#### 5.17 Projected Pupil Numbers

Some responses argued that the projections of pupils used in budget forecasting at the school were wrong or misleading. It has been argued by some responses that applications for places for the next two rounds of applications for Reception places (for pupils to start in September 2025 and September 2026) will be higher and they report testimonies from local parents to that effect. The view expressed is that the numbers used by the Governors and the Council cause the outlook to look unfavourable in terms of viability and

finances compared to the numbers which the respondents feel the school will have.

#### Response

The numbers used for financial planning by Governors were based upon existing numbers, previous intakes and the expectation by the Governing Board that the intake for September 2024 could be very low. On this basis governors used an estimate of 1 additional pupil joining in 2024 and 2 each year thereafter. At allocation day 16 April 2024 the school was allocated 1 pupil and therefore the Governing Board's projection has proved accurate. Beyond the current year of admission it is difficult to project demand for places at the school. Parental preference shifts year on year and parents who may want their child to attend a school in the future may, for a wide variety of reasons, change this preference at any point before the time comes for them to submit applications.

According to available data there are currently 18 children living in the St Hilda's catchment area of the age group which would apply for places for Reception in September 2025. If 6 of these pupils were to attend St Hilda's CE VC Primary School that would be 33% of the overall group. This is far higher than the percentage of comparable cohorts in the area that are currently attending the school. In two year groups there are 14 and 16 children of the same age and 0 pupils are attending St Hilda's CE VC Primary School. In two other year groups there are cohorts of 25 and 24 and only 5 pupils are attending St Hilda's out of that total of 49.

#### 5.18 Lack of Support for School

Some responses stated that there had been a lack of support for the school provided by the Council and that this was a factor in the closure proposal.

#### Response

The council's officers would not agree that there has been a lack of support shown to the school. The council values all of its schools and provides support for them on a basis commensurate to their situation at any particular time. There have been periods where extensive support has been provided to St Hilda's CE VC Primary School. An example would be the routine support provided by the School Improvement Service to ensure standards have been maintained in the school, the most recent Ofsted Inspection in 2020 made reference to the expertise provided by this team. Other examples would be the support provided in specific situations, as when the school required new leadership support at short notice the Council brokered support from another local maintained CE primary school and this was well received. When numbers were previously low at the school the Council supported the school through the process to federate with another local school.

#### 5.19 Not Viable

Whilst a clear majority of responses did not support the closure of the school a small number expressed the view that the school was no longer viable due to

the small number of pupils currently in attendance. One response stated that resources needed to be prioritised to other schools with more pupils. Another response noted that it was sad that they felt that the school was unviable.

#### Response

The low number of pupils attending the school and the related financial difficulty is ultimately the reason for the proposal.

#### 5.20 Other Options

Some responses and attendees at the meeting felt that not enough consideration had been given to other options other than closure. A number of respondents felt that particular proposals should be considered and the most often referenced option was for the school to become part of the Ryedale Learning Trust who have provided interim leadership support for the school. Another option which was suggested was that the school should work in partnership with St Benedict's Catholic Primary School as part of one school or shared working arrangement.

#### Response

When the Governing Board asked the Council to commence the consultation they did so having fully considered pupil numbers, financial prospects and future sources of leadership. The projected budget deficit was based upon the current leadership costs continuing and it is likely that the leadership costs would significantly increase if the school were to appoint a substantive headteacher (either full time or a part-time executive leadership with another school or schools) which would result in a further deterioration of the budget position.

With particular regard to the proposal for the school to join an academy trust, the pupil numbers have not grown sufficiently to ensure that the funding available will be sufficient for the school to be viable going forward. Consequently, while the Diocese previously had positive dialogue about the required steps for the school to join the Ryedale Learning Trust in the past and the trust discussed academy conversion with the Department for Education at that time, an application did not reach the Department for Education's advisory board due to the low and falling numbers and questions over the viability of the school. It should be noted that Ryedale Learning Trust no longer exists and any discussions with DfE about academy conversion have ceased.

With regards to the St Hilda CE VC Primary School working in partnership with the local Catholic primary school this would be challenging. St Benedict's Catholic Primary School is an academy which is part of the Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust and so any arrangements between the two schools would need to be proposed by the trust and supported by the relevant dioceses.

With the currently financial outlook for the school and as no school or trust has come forward with a solution during the consultation, no option for working with other schools is considered possible at this time.

#### 5.21 Presumption Against Closure of a Rural School

A high number of responses referenced the rurality of the area and the fact that the school is designated as a rural school. In particular the response from *Friends of St Hilda's School* references the guidance related the closure of rural schools in detail and argues that, when looking at the issues which need to be considered under that legislation, the school should not be closed.

##### Response

The statutory guidance for Opening and Closing Maintained Schools makes it clear that when closing Rural Schools, a number of factors must be taken into consideration. Although some of these factors have already been considered in the responses to some of the other issues raised above, this section will explicitly address each of the required considerations.

A) *the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;*

##### Response

See information provided in 5.7 above for further detail, to summarise, there are other venues that the local community can utilise, and they do not currently use St Hilda's for community events.

B) *the availability, and likely cost to the local authority, of transport to other schools;*

##### Response

Home to school travel assistance would be provided for entitled pupils in accordance with the Council's home to school transport policy. Costs will depend on the individual choices of schools by parents, and may also depend on the circumstances of individual pupils.

C) *any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase.*

##### Response

See information provided in 5.12 above. It is difficult to assess the impact given it is based upon parental preferences, a climate impact assessment has been completed.

D) *any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school. Proposers, for all rural closures, in addition to the above, should also provide evidence to show they have carefully considered alternatives to closure including conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust, Federation with another local school and the scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities (e.g. childcare facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access)*

Response

See information provided in 5.20 above, other options have been considered by the governing board and the Council.

*E) whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times*

Response

Attendance at any of the schools proposed as catchment schools for the current St Hilda's catchment area or the other local school at St Benedict's Catholic Primary School could be achieved without causing unreasonably long journey times.

*F) the size of the school and whether it puts the children at an educational disadvantage e.g. in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available*

Response

The council highly values the provision of education by small schools and North Yorkshire currently comprises of approximately 120 schools with fewer than 100 pupils on roll and approximately 50 of these schools with fewer than 50 pupils on roll. Although there is no straightforward correlation between the number of pupils on roll at a school and its standards, it is considered that when pupil numbers get extremely low, as in this instance, it is increasingly challenging to deliver the full breadth of curriculum and enable the social and emotional opportunities required for pupils in similar age peer groups.

*G) the proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. whether the school is being used by the local community.*

Response

As stated in further detail above only 13% of pupils living within the St Hilda's catchment area are currently attending St Hilda's CE VC Primary School.

*H) the overall and long term impact on local people and the community of the closure of the school and of the loss of the building as a community facility.*

Response

Information provided in 5.7 above, whilst the closure of the school will have an impact on any village, there are no community groups that utilise the school and there are alternative venues within the village.

*I) educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools.*

Response

This issue has been considered but the standards at St Hilda's CE VC Primary School have not been a key factor in bringing forward this proposal nor are the

displaced pupils expected to have any effect on the standards of neighbouring schools.

- J) *whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term).*

Response

This issue is discussed in detail in a number of sections above. It is considered that there is not a need to retain the school to meet the Council's sufficiency duty. The level of demand for places at the school is low and this has been a key factor in the closure proposal being brought forward.

- K) *wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils*

Response

This is addressed in section 5.6 above, there are a range of good schools in the area with capacity.

- L) *When proposing to close a school which includes early years provision, proposers should set out whether the alternative early years provision will integrate preschool education with childcare services and/or with other services for young children and their families*

Response

All of the proposed catchment schools have early years provision and there is also nursery provision in Ampleforth provided by Daisy Daycare and at St Benedict's Catholic Primary School.

5.22 Speed of Decision

A number of responses expressed that they thought the closure process had been rushed and that further time to consider other options was needed.

Response

The closure process for a Council maintained school is set out in statutory guidance and this proposal has been developed in line with that guidance. The initial decision to request the consultation which was taken by the Governing Board took account of the fact that Governors wanted to be able to provide clarity for parents by the end of this academic year about the future of the school.

5.23 Wrap around care

Some responses expressed great concern that a lack of wraparound care which is currently provided in Ampleforth could greatly disadvantage parents and pupils if St Hilda's CE VC Primary were to close. The wraparound care in the village is currently provided by a private provider and this provision also responded to the proposal expressing concern about the closure both for their business and the parents that they serve.

### Response

It has been confirmed by all of the proposed catchment schools that there is a wraparound care offer at their schools. Schools are required to publish information online about their wraparound offer. From September 2024 it is expected that provision will be available between 8am and 6pm on Monday to Friday. This may be achieved through a mix of school-led and private provision available locally for parents of children attending primary schools.

### Travel times and transport costs

- 5.24 At the public meeting and in written responses views were expressed that the distance to the proposed catchment schools were too far for primary aged children to travel and were therefore not appropriate alternative options. It was also stated that the proposals would increase transport costs.

### Response

The government's maximum recommended travel time for primary age pupils is 45 minutes each way and the proposed catchment schools are considerably closer than that to the relevant settlements within the current St Hilda's catchment area. For example Gilling East is 13 minutes by car from Terrington CE VA Primary School and Ampleforth is 14 minutes by car from Husthwaite CE VC Primary School.

As set out in para 7.2 below, there may be an additional cost to the Council's home to school transport budget, but this will depend on parental preference and their eligibility under the policy at the time of application.

- 5.25 Secondary School catchment areas

It was noted that the proposal for part of the current St Hilda's School catchment area to become part of the catchment area for Husthwaite School, would place children within a school in a different secondary school catchment area feeding into Outwood Academy Easingwold whereas Ampleforth is in the catchment area of Ryedale School, splitting friendship groups.

### Response

There are no plans to alter the secondary school catchment areas as part of this proposal; children living within the current St Hilda's School catchment area would continue to be within the secondary school catchment area of Ryedale School regardless of which primary school they attended.

## **6.0 PROPOSAL**

- 6.1 The proposal is to cease to maintain St Hilda's Ampleforth Church of England VC Primary School from 31 August 2024. The proposals include that, in the event of closure, the catchment area currently served by St Hilda's Church of

England VC School will be split between Terrington CE VA Primary School, Helmsley Community Primary School and Husthwaite CE. The parishes of Gilling East, Grimstone, Cawton and Coulton would become part of the catchment area for Terrington Church of England. The parishes of Oswaldkirk and Stonegrave would become part of the catchment area for Helmsley Community Primary School. The parishes of Byland with Wass and Ampleforth would become part of the catchment area for Husthwaite Church of England.

The full statutory proposal is set out in Appendix 1, Section A. This includes details about pupil numbers, alternative schools, impact on the community and travel implications.

## 6.2 The proposed timetable would be:

22 May 2024	Publication of Statutory Proposals
19 June 2024	Closing date for representations (4 weeks as prescribed in regulations and cannot be shortened or lengthened)
16 July 2024	Final decision by Executive
31 August 2024	Proposed closure date

## 7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

### 7.1 School revenue funding

Any annual savings to the Dedicated Schools Grant arising from the closure, if approved, would remain within the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant as part of the funding for all schools. Any surplus revenue or capital balances would be made available to the receiving school(s) in line with the Closing School Accounting Policy.

### 7.2 Transport costs

If the school closed, there could be a potential additional cost to the Council in providing transport to other schools. Home to school travel assistance would be provided for eligible pupils in accordance with the Council's Home to School transport policy. Costs will depend on the individual choices of schools by parents, and may also depend on the circumstances of individual pupils.

## 8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

### 8.1 The School Organisation regulations and guidance<sup>2</sup> cover the processes involved in school closures. Careful regard has been paid to these provisions.

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<sup>2</sup> School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 and Department for Education Opening and closing maintained schools. Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers (January 2023).



8.2 As St Hilda's Church of England VC Primary School is designated as a rural school there are some particular considerations for the proposers of any closure. There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean rural schools should not close. It means that the 'case for closure should be strong and the proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area'. Proposers must demonstrate that they have considered the following:

- Educational standards at the school and the effect on standards at other schools
- Alternatives to closure such as federation or academy status
- The availability and cost of transport to other schools
- Any potential increase to car use
- The impact on the community

These factors are considered in the draft statutory proposal, attached as Appendix 1, and in paragraphs 5.21 above.

## **9.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no Human Rights issues in relation to this decision.

## **10.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of this proposal and is attached (Appendix 6). The purpose of the consultation and proposed decision is to ensure that the children are provided with the best education provision in the area in a sustainable, stable and effective manner. In order to achieve these aims the proposal to close St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School needs to be considered. Whilst it is recognised that there may be adverse impact upon those with protected characteristics of age and religion/belief, there are more positive impacts that will result if these proposals are implemented. As these proposals develop any adverse impacts will be carefully monitored, and all reasonable mitigations will be taken.

## **11.0 NEXT STEPS**

11.1 It is proposed to publish proposals and statutory notices on 22 May 2024. The proposals would be published on the Council's website and the statutory notice would be published in a local newspaper and displayed at the main entrances to the school. These would provide four weeks for representations to be made to the Council, by 19 June 2024.

11.2 The Executive agreed a model for decision-making on school organisation proposals on 25 September 2007. If approval is given to publish statutory proposals and notices, it is proposed that a final decision is taken by the Executive on 16 July 2024.

## **12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

## 12.1

- i) Statutory proposals and notices be published on 22 May 2024 proposing to cease to maintain St Hilda's Church of England VC Primary School with effect from 31 August 2024.
- ii) The proposals include that, in the event of closure, the catchment area currently served by St Hilda's Church of England VC School will be split between Terrington CE VA Primary School, Helmsley Community Primary School and Husthwaite CE. The parishes of Gilling East, Grimstone, Cawton and Coulton would become part of the catchment area for Terrington Church of England. The parishes of Oswaldkirk and Stonegrave would become part of the catchment area for Helmsley Community Primary School. The parishes of Byland with Wass and Ampleforth would become part of the catchment area for Husthwaite Church of England
- iii) The Executive schedule taking a final decision on these proposals on 16 July 2024.

Stuart Carlton  
Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service

Report prepared by Matt George, Strategic Planning Team

### List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Full draft statutory proposals and draft statutory notice  
Appendix 2: Consultation Paper  
Appendix 3: List of the Consultees  
Appendix 4: Notes of the Public Meeting  
Appendix 5: Consultation Responses  
Appendix 6: Equality Impact Assessment  
Appendix 7: Climate Change Impact Assessment