

Appendix 5B

Consultation responses

Friends of St Hilda's School Statement of Support



Friends
of St Hilda's School
Ampleforth

St Hilda's CE Primary School
Ampleforth, North Yorkshire

Statement of Support



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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Statutory Guidance	2
3	Supporting Statement	4
	3.1 Responses to Potential Reasons for Closure	4
	3.2 Presumption Against the Closure of Rural Schools	9
	3.3 Alternatives to Closure	11
	3.4 Alternative Early Years Provision	12
	3.5 Effects on children	13
	3.6 Ryedale Local Plan	13
	3.7 Previous Leadership and Impacts from Hovingham School Closure	13
	3.8 Open Consultation on Home to School Transport Provision	14
	3.9 Consultation Timings	14
4	Conclusions	15
Appendix A	Personal Statements	17



1 Introduction

- 1.1 St Hilda's CE Primary School is a rural village school and community pre-school, situated in Ampleforth, on the edge of the North York Moors National Park, North Yorkshire.
- 1.2 The school has been at the heart of village life since its original foundation in 1890, and is located on a beautiful site, with glorious views, a large playing field, trees, wildlife area and playground.
- 1.3 The school has been consistently rated as 'Good' by Ofsted, with pupils, parents and teachers stating that it 'feels like a family', everyone knows one another well and pupils of all ages learn and play together in a happy, safe environment.
- 1.4 Due to a temporary decline in pupil numbers, largely due to the misguided parental uncertainty on the school's future and the school's previous leadership, rather than the quality of educational provision and the happiness of the pupils, it was agreed at a meeting of the Governing Board of St Hilda's on 17th January 2024 that, following a discussion about pupil numbers, financial prospects and future sources of leadership, to invite North Yorkshire Council to commence a consultation on closure of the school.
- 1.5 Parents and members of the community, who have been active in supporting the school both individually and as part of the 'Friends of St Hilda's' (FoSH) PTA group, have mobilised against the proposed school closure.
- 1.6 This Statement of Support provides an overview of the reasons why it is strongly felt that the school should not be allowed to close, and the devastating impacts that such a closure would have on pupils, parents, and village life.
- 1.7 A representative sample of individual personal statements provided by parents and members of the local community are also provided in Appendix A.

2 Statutory Guidance

- 2.1 The Department for Education's publication *Opening and closing maintained schools* (January 2023) provides the statutory guidance that proposers and decision makers must have regard to it when discontinuing (closing) an existing school.
- 2.2 The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that good quality school places are provided where they are needed.
- 2.3 The guidance states five main reasons for the potential closure of a school:
- *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 to long term.*
 - *It is to be amalgamated with another school.*
 - *It has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and the Secretary of State has revoked the academy order.*
 - *It is no longer considered viable.*
 - *It is being replaced by a new school.*
- 2.4 The guidance also states that the Department for Education expects all decision makers to adopt **a presumption against the closure of rural schools** and that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.
- 2.5 In formulating any closure proposals in relation to a rural primary school, proposers must have regard to:
- *the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;*
 - *the availability, and likely cost to the local authority, of transport to other schools;*
 - *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; and*
 - *any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.*
- 2.6 The guidance further states that, 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. The proposer should set out:
- *plans to develop alternative early years provision clearly demonstrating that it will be at least equal in quantity to the provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism; and*
 - *how replacement provision is more accessible and more convenient for local parents.*
- 2.7 It is considered that in the Consultation Document provided by North Yorkshire Council (NYC) (dated March 2024), that there is little evidence of these legal requirements, as stated above, having been fully considered and proven. Several requirements have not been considered in the document at all, including:
- *the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;*



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

2.8 Responses to the relevant stated reasons for the potential closure of a school, and its likely effects, in direct relation to the consultation on the closure of St Hilda's CE Primary School, Ampleforth, are provided in Section 3 below.



3 Supporting Statement

3.1 Responses to Potential Reasons for Closure

'there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils...'

- 3.1.1 Table 1 provides a summary of the available alternative schools as provided by North Yorkshire Council (NYC) in the Consultation Document, and a summary of the reasons of unsuitability. Further detail, where required, is provided below.

Table 1 Summary of available school suitability

Primary School	Latest Ofsted inspection	Current % Capacity	Year at Capacity	Distance from Ampleforth	Identified reasons of unsuitability
St Benedict's RC Primary School	Good	77%	N/A	0.3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Catholic provision not suitable for CoE or non-faith families. 2. Non-catchment school and not classed as a rural school (therefore not the village school). 3. Selective admissions policy limits/prevents non-Christian faith families from attending at capacity.
Helmsley Community School	Good	94%	2027/2028	4.8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not in catchment. 2. Unknown transport provision. 3. Reaches capacity within 3 years preventing those with siblings planning to attend[#]. 4. Currently not able to accommodate St Hilda's Yr 4 (to be Yr 5's in 2024/25). 5. No wraparound care provision (not accepting new children).
Hustwaite CoE Primary School	Requires improvement	54%	N/A	6.2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poor quality education (compared to St Hilda's). 2. Unknown transport provision. 3. Unsuitable distance from Ampleforth (preventing young children travelling without parental/guardian support). 4. No wraparound care (reduced hours on certain days preventing full-time working parents from accessing it). 5. Not within Ampleforth Secondary school catchment.
Crayke CoE Primary School	Outstanding	98%	N/A*	7.5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At capacity in several year groups and not in catchment therefore unlikely to accept new pupils from St Hilda's.
Slingsby Primary School	Good	116%	2024/2025	9.4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At capacity and not in catchment therefore unlikely to accept new pupils from St Hilda's.
Terrington CoE Primary School	Good	43%	N/A	9.4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Too far from Ampleforth.

Notes: N/A indicates a school is not predicted to reach capacity prior to the 2028/2029 school year.

* = Very limited year spaces in several year groups.

= Currently understood that siblings being split between Helmsley and Thirsk where year groups are at capacity.

St Benedict's Roman Catholic Primary School

- 3.1.2 St Benedict's Roman Catholic Primary School was originally established to provide Catholic primary education to staff at nearby Ampleforth College, not to act as the village school, which was the role of St Hilda's. Ampleforth has been able to support both schools well for several decades, and can continue to do so.
- 3.1.3 Being a Roman Catholic school, St Benedict's is not an option for everyone, as it is very strongly faith-focused. Specifically, Religious Education (RE) is taught in all classes and, as required by the Bishops of England and Wales, 10% of curriculum time is allocated to teaching RE. Teaching at St Benedict's incorporates 'Big Questions' which include "Who made the world and everything in it?" and "What does it mean to be called or chosen?". Worship at St Benedict's is described as *'more than just a legal requirement. It is an integral part of school life and central to the Catholic tradition.'*
- 3.1.4 By assuming that families will take a place at a Catholic school is discriminating against those who are not of the Catholic faith. Families who do not subscribe to a Catholic education cannot be expected to send their children to a school which according to its website: *'...has the Gospel values at its core. The Catholic ethos is palpable throughout the school as Christ is the centre of everything we do...producing the best possible Catholic education for your child.'*
- 3.1.5 In year 3, children who are baptised Catholics are invited to prepare for the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, whereas the non-Catholic children are excluded from these preparations, leaving non-Catholic children to feel excluded (anecdotal evidence). St Hilda's, in contrast, fosters a fully inclusive environment.
- 3.1.6 St Benedict's has much larger class sizes than St Hilda's, which is not necessarily 'better' to serve the educational needs of some children. The school will also soon reach capacity (proposed to be at 77% capacity in 2024/25) and, with proposed village growth, there will be increasing pressure on school places.
- 3.1.7 Although St Benedict's are open to non-Catholics at present, it is in their admissions policy that they can refuse non-Catholics should school capacity be reached. This could significantly impact those families with younger siblings planning to attend the school in future years as the village population grows and more pressure is placed on local primary school places. It is known that several non-Catholic families have moved to the village specifically with the future plans to send their children to St Hilda's not St Benedict's.
- 3.1.8 Traffic and pedestrian access provision to St Benedict's is already problematic. There have been several near-miss incidents close to the school, there is no parking (safe road-side or dedicated) or pavement provision to the school, and the lane to the school is a narrow single-lane, which is heavily congested and dangerous during school pick-up and drop off times.
- 3.1.9 Eld Close is a private (non-adopted) road to a small close of houses situated near to St Benedict's where the residents (and those who are responsible for the private roadway) have already had numerous issues with parents parking on the private road. This is leading to conflict and concern over potential liabilities for risk should an incident occur.
- 3.1.10 If St Hilda's closes, the traffic (both car and pedestrian) along this already dangerous and unsuitable access route could be substantially increased.

Husthwaite CE Primary School

- 3.1.11 Husthwaite CE Primary School is situated over six miles from Ampleforth and, based on the most recent Ofsted inspection, currently 'requires improvement'.
- 3.1.12 The Department for Education's guidance *Opening and closing maintained schools*

(January 2023) states that the proposers to close a school should provide evidence to show they have carefully considered '*wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils*'. Accordingly, Husthwaite School does not fulfil this requirement/consideration.

- 3.1.13 Husthwaite school lies within the Easingwold Secondary School catchment area - Ampleforth is within the Ryedale Secondary School catchment. It is not acceptable for children to be expected to attend a primary school, and create friendship groups, and then have this support completely removed as they leave primary education for a different secondary school than others in their peer group.
- 3.1.14 Husthwaite currents wraparound care provision does not currently operate for full days every weekday. This would severely impact many full-time working families. Impacts may include; needing to reduce working hours, a reduction in taxable income, a reduction in disposable income which subsequently impacts on the local economy, and a reduction in non-disposable income which may ultimately result in needing to move away from the village.
- 3.1.15 It is not acceptable to expect young children (three- to five-year-olds) to travel over 20 minutes by bus to school without their primary caregiver/parent accompanying them. This will result in increased private vehicle movements from Ampleforth to Husthwaite.
- 3.1.16 Given the distance of Husthwaite School from Ampleforth, and that the ages of most children at St Hilda's would prevent them travelling by bus unattended, there would be significant increases in car journeys between the villages. Just a single additional journey would represent 2,496 miles per academic year, which equates to an additional ~0.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions (calculated on carbonfootprint.com). Approximately 40 extra trees would need to be planted each year to offset this increase (climateneutralgroup.com).
- 3.1.17 In July 2022 North Yorkshire Council declared a climate emergency in North Yorkshire; therefore, the increased carbon footprint related to the closure of St Hilda's will directly contravene their statement that '*we continue to look for opportunities within our carbon reduction plan to meet our targets*'. North Yorkshire Council has recently opened a public consultation on the provision of home to school travel in the county as this is the third largest item of revenue expenditure for the council. Accordingly North Yorkshire Council stated that they '*...must strike the right balance to fulfil the competing needs of our statutory services while ensuring other services are sustainable*'. The closure of St Hilda's would significantly increase the need for home to school transport provision within the village.

'...and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term'

- 3.1.18 At present, there is a planned admission of one child in school year 2024/25 (updated following recent information), and at least six in school year 2025/2026, and at least two in 2026/27. These numbers are confirmed numbers, with these numbers to be considered a minimum only.
- 3.1.19 Taking into account planned Year 6 leavers in 2024 (four) means that school population will be 10 in 2024/25. Taking into account Year 6 leavers in 2025 (one) means that school population for 2025/26 will be 15. Please note these numbers do not include nursery provision which is provided within the Key Stage 1 class.
- 3.1.20 Currently, the NYC Consultation Document predicts pupil numbers of 11 in 2024/25, which is incorrect. The confirmed 15 pupils for 2024/25 indicates that NYC has not accurately predicted the likely future student numbers in the medium and long-term, and

as such their financial estimates are inaccurate - these should be revisited.

- 3.1.21 The current pupil numbers at St Hilda's indicates that significant growth will likely occur in 2025/26, 2027/28, and 2028/29 where only one or zero Year 6's will leave in the preceding year.

'it is no longer considered viable;'

- 3.1.22 St Hilda's has been rated 'Good' by Ofsted in its last three inspections. It has pupils who are thriving in the nurturing and loving environment that the school offers. Children with EHCPs are included and have their needs met exceptionally well. The children strive to learn and help each other every day.

- 3.1.23 Far from being 'not viable', St Hilda's is actually an example of how successfully a primary school can produce bright and caring individuals who are prepared for the next stage in their education – the reason why there is sustained interest by parents in the village in their young children joining the school in the future. Financial predictions included in the NYC statement are based on inaccurate future pupil numbers (see Section 3.1.17).

3.2 Presumption Against the Closure of Rural Schools

'...the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.'

- 3.2.1 Ampleforth is defined in the Ryedale Plan (Local Plan Strategy) as a 'Service' village which is expanding all the time, and in which land within and adjacent to the village has been 'allocated' for future residential development. Recently parcels of land in Ampleforth have been made available for purchase for housing development.
- 3.2.2 Such development will inevitably see an increased demand for primary school places, especially as St Benedict's reaches capacity, and not being necessarily a preferable school for many people due to its strict religious ethos.
- 3.2.3 The closure of St Hilda's will create a significant 'gap' in primary school provision in the local area, with the nearest school now over 4.5 miles away (Helmsley), and the proposed in-catchment school over 6 miles away.
- 3.2.4 The provision of C of E primary schools in the local areas is severely limited, this is made more profound following the recent closure of Hovingham C of E Primary school in 2023.
- 3.2.5 St Hilda's provides good quality educational provision, with extensive in- and extra-curricular clubs, including, but not limited to Coding Club, Gardening Club, and twice-weekly physical education provided by external specialists. The extra-curricular clubs are well attended by current pupils, indicating that pupils are engaged at the school and keen to extend their learning opportunities.
- 3.2.6 It is not considered unreasonable to presume that if the school is closed, the buildings will be demolished and the land sold, in all likelihood to housing developers. If another housing estate is built, the village will need increased primary school provision.

'the likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community.'

- 3.2.7 St Hilda's has been Ampleforth's village primary school since 1890, and sits at the heart of the village and community life, with several fourth and fifth generation children attending the school and ex-teachers and former pupils still living and working in the village. The school provides a fantastic community hub, with events being well attended and highly successful.
- 3.2.8 The school currently employs approximately 50% of its staff and student teachers from the village, and therefore the closure of St Hilda's would have a significant impact of the village community.
- 3.2.9 Several village residents complete work experience and training at the school, meaning they have a sustainable commute and work in their own community in Ampleforth. Students from the local college regularly complete their citizenship studies, meaning the school supports and encourages the future teaching workforce.
- 3.2.10 Several families have publicly confirmed that one of the critical reasons for moving to Ampleforth was the provision of St Hilda's. The closure of the school will likely reduce the number of young families moving to the village. Significantly, this will create a more aged population in the village, putting increased pressure on services such as healthcare, but reduce demand for service facilities such as the café, pub, and shop. Ampleforth is designated as a 'service village' in the Ryedale Plan, which means the aim is to grow the village through housing development to attract a diverse population range. This aspiration of the District Council will be substantially negatively impacted by the loss of the village school.

- 3.2.11 Closing a primary school is not comparable to closing a business. The lives of the families whose children attend St Hilda's are wrapped-up in the everyday activities of the school and its continued success.
- 3.2.12 Those who have children with special needs and EHCPs are receiving excellent educational provision at St Hilda's which cannot be guaranteed elsewhere. If that provision is not available locally, parents are faced with the stark decision of moving out of the village, uprooting themselves and their family in order to be near to a school that can meet their children's needs. An EHCP is a legally binding document and accordingly, an alternative school must be able to provide the environment, structure, and teaching methods set out within the document.
- 3.2.13 Should St Hilda's be closed, the impact it will have on many people will be devastating. Not least the children who love their school and the family-like friendship they have developed with each other. Not one of the children want to leave this school.
- 3.2.14 Daisy Day Care, a private childcare provider in Ampleforth, provides wraparound care for almost all the children currently attending St Hilda's. Should St Hilda's close it would likely have a severe impact on Daisy Day Care's numbers, since – if children begin to attend Husthwaite (as per the new school catchment plans) these children would be removed from Ampleforth and not able to access Daisy's before-and-after-school provision. This provision accounts for a significant proportion of Daisy's income, and as such a change could devastate a business that is integral to Ampleforth village. Please see the attached statement from Daisy Day Care in Appendix A).
- 3.2.15 Daisy Day Care has confirmed that they are now seeing an increase in interest from children aged nine-months plus following the increase in 'free hours' childcare provision from the Government. Significantly, in order to accommodate this, they require an increased proportion of the three- and four-year-olds to move to pre-school (nursery) provision in the village school. Having local provision in the village school for this is important, as it is not possible to send pre-school children on buses to out-of-village pre-schools, and therefore traffic journeys will increase.
- 3.2.16 The potential impact of the closure of St Hilda's on Daisy Day Care could force the provision to close which would force families to reduce working hours , further increasing families often already over-stretched financial pressures and decreasing taxable income.

3.3 Alternatives to Closure

'...in relation to a rural primary school, proposers must have regard to any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.'

- 3.3.1 It is considered that NYCs time and finances are far better spent on supporting St Hilda's through this short-term drop in pupil numbers, rather than taking the drastic (and extraordinary) decision to close this long-established school.
- 3.3.2 The temporary financial support required to keep the school open in 2024/25 would likely be minimal, or at least comparable to increased home to school transport, staff redundancy, legacy school maintenance payments, and the cost of having to provide further primary school provision following the planned growth of the village.
- 3.3.3 St Hilda's is a much-loved primary school which has high educational standards, a 'Good' Ofsted rating, thriving children, and a long history of producing exceptional students keen for their move to secondary school. Its closure is proposed because of a projected shortfall in a single intake: next September 2024. For the sake of a small amount of financial support, in the short term, it seems unthinkable that the permanent loss of an excellent educational provider is even being considered.
- 3.3.4 Marketing and promotion of the school mobilised by the 'Friends of St Hilda's' parent group following the announcement of consultation of closure has resulted in clear evidence of medium and long-term demand for pupil places in the school. Subsequently, a clear alternative to the discontinuance of the school is for NYC to provide support in this continuing marketing and promotion in order to further target those children within the wider catchment area.

'Proposers, for all rural closures...should also provide evidence to show they have carefully considered alternatives to closing including, conversion to academy status and joining a multi- academy trust.'

- 3.3.5 The Areté Learning Trust (formerly Ryedale Learning Trust which has now been merged) continue to actively support St Hilda's, and are still keen to federate the school should the Department for Education accept the proposal based on the newly revised medium and long-term financial predictions. They understand the needs of a small school and know that St Hilda's is successful and will continue to thrive with increasing pupil numbers going forward.
- 3.3.6 St Hildas is currently a financially successful school with no debt and a good record of financial success. The school will not fall into debt until part way through the 2024/25 academic year, which a small shortfall identified for the remaining year into 2025/26. An interim grant/bridging loan from North Yorkshire Council would allow St Hilda's to remain open and, once the projected numbers are reached in 2025, St Hilda's will be in a position to join The Ryedale Learning Trust.
- 3.3.7 Failing schools - some with serious educational or safeguarding issues – have consistently received support to keep them open. However, St Hilda's - through no fault of its pupils or teachers, but because of a temporary shortfall in pupil numbers - is expected to close its doors in a matter of months. This is a wholly disproportionate reaction to a temporary and reversible situation. NYC confirmed that from March 36 schools in North Yorkshire are currently in deficit (average of approximately £194,000 (BBC News, reported on 29 February 2024), yet, at present, St Hilda's is the only school under consultation for closure, with at approximately 25 schools being assisted financially through NYC loans/grants scheme(s). It is important to note that St Hilda's is not in debt currently.

3.3.8 Rural school classification suggests proposers should look beyond the 2024 intake when considering closing a school. If St Hilda's is afforded this perspective, it can be demonstrated that projected school numbers will rise, and prospective parents who are considering sending their children to St Hilda's will have their confidence restored - that it will be there to take their children.

3.4 Alternative Early Years Provision

3.4.1 Although St Hilda's isn't a nursery school, it provides pre-school education for children aged three and four - including an experienced EYFS teacher in post.

3.4.2 It is assumed that following any closure, NYC would have to develop alternative early years provision, that would be of '*at least equal in quantity with no loss of expertise and specialism*', which would include the provision of an EYFS teacher.

3.5 Effects on children

- 3.5.1 Moving a child from a safe and secure known school environment to a new unfamiliar school during critical development periods of a child's life is disruptive and unnecessary and will affect mental health and learning. *'If a child struggles with a transition it can have a negative impact on their wellbeing and academic achievement'* (mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk).
- 3.5.2 The small, mixed-aged classes at St Hilda's foster a wonderful nurturing environment where pupils expand their learning through interactions with children of varying ages. An abrupt and unnecessary movement of pupils to disparate alternative primary schools will have a huge impact on the wellbeing of all the children currently at St Hilda's.
- 3.5.3 Children with EHCP plans will likely be disproportionately impacted by the change in school environment from which they are used to (larger classes and schools increase stress triggers for many which may result in these children finding mainstream school unsuitable. In turn this may increase the requirement for NYC to fund places in alternative more expensive specialist provision schools).

3.6 Ryedale Local Plan

- 3.6.1 Ampleforth is named as a 'service village' in the Ryedale Local Plan (The Ryedale Plan - Local Plan Strategy, Section 6 Physical Infrastructure and Community Facilities, p. 109, policy effective from September 2013 (to 2027), states under 'health and education' *'Primary education - Additional capacity required at: ... Ampleforth...Schools'*.
- 3.6.2 Closing St Hilda's directly contravenes this statement and indicates that a longer-term more strategic view of likely development in Ampleforth has not been fully considered in the proposal to close St Hilda's.
- 3.6.3 In the Ryedale Local Plan Strategy (p. 29), Ampleforth is included as a 'Local Service Centre (Service Village) - Tertiary Focus for Growth'. Section 4.14 (p. 45) states that, of the planned 15-year supply of deliverable and developable land, approximately 10% of this will be distributed among the service villages.
- 3.6.4 Again, this indicates that Ampleforth has a requirement to grow its housing stock in accordance with the Ryedale strategy and indicates that a longer-term more strategic view of likely population increases in Ampleforth has not been fully considered in the proposal to close St Hilda's. Ampleforth is not an aging village, it is a thriving and growing mixed population medium-sized village.

3.7 Previous Leadership and Impacts from Hovingham School Closure

- 3.7.1 Hovingham school and St Hilda's were federated schools prior to the closure of Hovingham in 2023. During this time, since approximately 2020 until August 2022, the previous Headteacher for both schools provided poor leadership. This, as is evidenced by many of the Hovingham consultation statements from parents, and the declining trend in pupil numbers at St Hilda's since 2019, has had a significant impact on parents trust in the long-term viability of the
- 3.7.2 school. These issues, along with poor management of pursuing and joining a suitable Federation and/or Trust created a fragile environment for the school, which ultimately led to parents moving their children from St Hilda's. The removal of children from the school has been due to either historical leadership issues (now resolved), or nervousness from partner school closure. Importantly, it is not due to the education provision or current staff members present at and leading the school.

3.7.3 Accordingly, St Hilda's should be given a period of time to allow trust in the long-term viability of the school to regrow, following which, the pupil numbers will naturally improve.

3.8 Open Consultation on Home to School Transport Provision

3.8.1 NYC are currently running a consultation on home to school transport provision in North Yorkshire. The outcomes of this consultation are not yet available, and so it is unknown what schools will and will not be included in the transport provision from Ampleforth. As many parents rely on this provision, is it not possible for parents to make informed decisions on preferred schools should St Hilda's progress to closure.

3.8.2 The results of the home to school transport consultation may increase pupil numbers, as, currently, several villages that are not in the catchment for St Hilda's (e.g. Cold Kirby) may get transport to their closest school (i.e. St Hilda's rather than Helmsley in which it is in catchment for).

3.8.3 Due to the consultation still being open, it has not been possible for local wrap around care providers to consider if they could accommodate collection from local school buses etc.; therefore, wraparound care provisions continue to be unknown (having potentially significant impacts on parents' future working hours plans).

3.9 Consultation Timings

3.9.1 Due to the timings of the consultation decision (16 July 2024) and the school term ending (19 July 2024), only three days after, there is insufficient time and information for current and future parents to make informed (including school visits) choices for their children.

3.9.2 It is known from surrounding schools that have recently closed or almost closed that discussions on the closure of the schools have begun significantly prior to the formal consultation starting (to note, both Hovingham and Fountain's Earth had no pupils and/or permanent staff prior to closure/almost closure). There were previously no discussions with parents prior to the application to the NYC to consult on closure from the Governors. This is a significant move away from what is considered a more usual process and has considerably disadvantaged St Hilda's accordingly.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 We believe that St Hilda's is a thriving, viable and educationally successful school, that sits at the heart of the village, with strong relationships between St Hilda's and the wider community.
- 4.2 The school has excellent teaching staff and facilities, has been consistently rated 'Good' by Ofsted and excels in its special needs provision. St Hilda's continues to mould well-rounded, kind, and highly educated children, whilst allowing them the space to develop their own unique personalities.
- 4.3 The potential school closure would have devastating impacts on the wellbeing of St Hilda's young pupils and the continuity of their education. It would have far-reaching emotional, financial and employment repercussions for parents and carers. It would adversely impact local businesses and deprive Ampleforth of a hugely important cross-community resource. Closing St Hilda's School would also permanently reduce school provision in a village that has been highlighted for continued residential growth in the Ryedale Local Plan.
- 4.4 Key reasons to decline the consultation for closure and keep St Hilda's open are:
1. Medium- and long-term future pupil numbers are incorrect. Therefore, financial estimations based on these figures should be revised (i.e. the current Consultation Document is not correct).
 2. St Hilda's is consistently rated as 'good' by Ofsted with excellent educational provisions for all ages, including, but not limited to, Coding Club and dedicated weekly Physical Education days provided by external specialists.
 3. The Ryedale Local Plan states that additional primary school provision is required in Ampleforth (to allow for projected growth proposed due to the 'service village' designation).
 4. The alternative schools provided by NYC are not considered suitable alternatives for many reasons including: non-aligned faiths, not of equal or better educational status (poor Ofsted), requires significant increases private travel where school transport provisions would not be suitable (young children), limited or no wraparound care, and/or are currently at or soon to be at capacity.
 5. Parents cannot make an informed decision due to the consultation timings and open consultation on transport to schools.
 6. The closure would have a significant negative impact on local businesses, including Daisy Day Care, and the effectiveness of Ampleforth to continue to attract and retain young families.
- 4.5 It is considered that NYC has not provided sufficient evidence regarding all the requirements as set out in the Department for Education's *Opening and closing maintained schools* (January 2023) and is therefore not fulfilling its legal duties.
- 4.6 If given temporary financial support from NYC, St Hilda's would see a restoration in the confidence of prospective parents to send their children to the school without fear of closure and prevent the loss of a village institution that has served generations of children and should continue to serve future generations.

Appendix A

Personal Statements

Personal Statements

The statements below have been collated from parents, former pupils, members of the local community, and friends of the school. These reflect the support that the school has at the centre of village life and how its potential closure would have a severe impact on individuals, families and the sustainability of the village itself.

Personal Statement 1.

Mr # and Mrs #

Parent of Year 1 pupil and pre-school pupil

We moved # to St Hilda's from our catchment school in Helmsley in September last year and no regrets. Helmsley School was not fit for purpose, my daughter, in her own words 'hated it', the class sizes were too big and her learning inadequate. We had nothing but issues at that school.

Since moving to St Hilda's, # has thrived. Not only has her learning vastly improved but due to the care and attention the teachers give, she is happy, has formed good friendships and has a better attitude towards school. We are also much happier with her attending a Church of England school as we are a Church of England family.

This school cannot be closed. Large schools (that are only set to grow further due to closure of other schools) are simply not functional for some children, as our experience proves. Helmsley is too big and cannot cope with the number of children it already has. Smaller village schools need to remain as an option for families where large schools are not suitable.

We do not get provided with transport to Ampleforth but yet it is closer to us than Helmsley. I think a review of the catchment and transport provision needs to be done.

If St Hilda's closes, the Catholic School in the village is not an option for us as we are Church of England and we do not align with the Catholic ethos. Husthwaite School takes us approximately 25 minutes to get to, meaning my school run will be nearly an hour, two hours a day, which is absurd in an era where we are trying to reduce emissions.

I have a younger daughter who will attend St Hilda's in the reception intake in 2025 and is currently in both St Hilda's pre-school and Daisy Day Care in the village. If St Hilda's closes she will no longer attend that nursery. I will no longer support the village shop and café on a regular basis as I will have no reason to be in Ampleforth.

cannot attend three schools in three years, it is just ridiculous. She is now settled at St Hilda's and has great pride in her school, I fear any movement of her place of education will now result in a massive step back to our nightmare days at Helmsley and set back her education and learning.

St Hilda's has been nothing but welcoming to # and our family, they have turned her learning around, and it breaks my heart on a daily basis when she is so happy to go to school to think this may be shattered by bureaucrats at a desk who have no idea of the impact it will have on families and children.

We pay council tax and are therefore entitled to choose the school we wish; we are paying for the education. I question by looking to close this school on no real reasonable grounds (the financial implications in the consultation do not even align to the future projected intake of pupils in the school) is in fact in breach of our human rights.

Personal Statement 2.

Mr and Mrs #

Parent of Year 6 pupil

We have witnessed nothing but exemplary teaching provision, delivered in a caring and nurturing environment at St. Hilda's primary school. It is a school where you immediately sense the high level of professionalism and genuine love that the staff have for the children. We couldn't have asked for anywhere better to send our children to be schooled in the local area.

Our youngest son is autistic, he started at the nursery (great pre-curriculum provision) and continued his schooling at St. Hilda's until he was eight and able to transfer to a special needs school. He would not be progressing emotionally, socially and academically the way he is now if it wasn't for the time he spent at St. Hilda's. His Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is in place solely down to the tireless hard work, love and dedication that the SENCO, teaching staff and assistants put into his care and development. We, the family, the school and the local authority have a duty of care so that he can become the best citizen he can possibly be. St. Hilda's has been a hugely positive influence on his future happiness and wellbeing. We have been so incredibly fortunate to have had St. Hilda's. He would not have received the same level of dedication, direction and support elsewhere. When he transferred to the special needs school, we received two very large folders of curriculum work that he had completed. All marked, signed, dated and with photographic evidence. Nothing short of extraordinary for a child who at that time was essentially non-verbal.

Our older son moves to secondary school in September. A massive life stage that he has been prepared for by the teachers at St. Hilda's. He is very keen to go and prove himself in the world. Brimming with energy and enthusiasm for the future – attributes reflected in his peers. All fantastic ambassadors for St. Hilda's. All of them unique, their individuality encouraged and nurtured by St. Hilda's. All of them showing great promise for the future as citizens of this country.

So where does that leave the children who remain? There are currently children with EHCPs who display the same needs and desires to be included as our son. Whose needs are being met because of the dedication and expertise of the teaching and assisting staff. We are discriminating against these children if we cruelly uproot them from a place of safety, nurture and love. Will we let these children down and shut the school? What message are we sending out? The quality of education, the care, the friendship – all gone for the sake of a small amount of taxpayers' money.

St. Hilda's needs protecting. It is a beacon of all that is good. It is a shining example of what primary education should be like. All inclusive, producing children who respect and care for each other regardless of background, religion or ability. It has been the primary school education provider in the village since 1890. The impact of the closure will put a massive strain on the village, the children, the parents, teachers and of course, the system. If this is about a short-term blip in numbers, the decision to close is extraordinary. The money supposedly saved by shutting the school will be nothing compared to the money lost as families begin to lean on council services just to get their children schooled.

This is a serious matter for Ampleforth and Ryedale. The level of distress this is causing to concerned parents and staff, as well as being extremely confusing and upsetting for the children, is wholly unacceptable.

Personal Statement 3.

Ms # and Mr#

Parent of Year 1 pupil

Our son has attended St Hilda's since nursery which he started post lockdown.

The way St Hilda's school and its staff embraced the changes to the education system and all the complications that covid brought. And that is admirable.

They had children who had been delayed in starting in education due to lockdown, and yet the work and involvement with these pupils has meant they are not behind in their studies. In fact quite the opposite, they are thriving.

We moved to Ampleforth for our son to attend St Hilda's. We lived in a large town, and I had actually attended St Hilda's as a child. I knew first-hand how St Hilda's has a massive impact on the community surrounding it and vice versa.

We wanted our son to have a good education, in a small school, where the teaching staff had the time for the pupils as the classes weren't 30+ and also had good relationships with the students.

The school suggested to move our children to is Husthwaite. This is over 6 miles away. It is also in need of improvement. Why would we want our children to lose the connection to Ampleforth, the relationships made in the community.

You are essentially ripping children out of an excellent school, making them travel when some have complex needs to a larger and somewhat poorer quality school.

Husthwaite primary also feeds into Easingwold secondary school, and this again is not a school we want our son to attend. He has gone to St Hilda's in Ampleforth looking to go to Ryedale school in the future.

This suggested closure is very short sighted. There are many young families within Ampleforth with more than one child set to start St Hilda's school. Surely the figures of future pupils speak for themselves.

Personal Statement 4.

Mr and Mrs #

Parent of Year 1 and Year 4 pupils

Our son has attended St Hilda's since nursery which he started post lockdown.

We are devastated at the decision to begin the consultation to close St Hilda's Primary School. Both of our children are thriving at this wonderful, caring school.

Our eldest child, #, has significant special educational needs and the school have supported him with expert care and professionalism. The school SENDCo has worked tirelessly with his class teacher since he joined the Nursery, to provide him with a superb level of individualised care and educational activities. Mrs Dodds-Aston also worked incredibly hard to pull together the evidence required to gain #'s EHCP – including working from # # # to meet deadlines. We couldn't be more grateful.

He has made significant progress during his time at St Hilda's, and we can credit the fabulous staff with their patience and understanding of his needs. This success is, in part, we believe, down to the size of the school/class and how brilliantly the school is able to provide an individualised curriculum to suit #'s needs. We are incredibly concerned that if St Hilda's were to close, # would need to move to a larger school, with larger, busier classes and would become 'lost in the system'. We believe that # has been able to stay within the mainstream education system for so long, due to the attention and education St Hilda's has been able to provide.

Our youngest son, # joined St Hilda's two years ago and has loved every minute of it. His teacher knows him incredibly well and is therefore able to plan lessons around his interests and learning styles. He has already made fantastic progress and despite his slightly chaotic personality, achieves well and enjoys school.

As a family, we have developed strong links with the school, nothing is too much trouble, and the staff bend over backwards to accommodate two tired and forgetful working parents! We rely heavily on the essential links the school has with our local day care provider Daisy Day Care. We are incredibly concerned that if St Hilda's closes, we will be unable to use Daisy Day Care's wrap around provision, therefore losing access to an essential part of our support network as full-time working parents. This could prove to be as significant as threatening our jobs, if one or both of us is required to transport our children to an alternative school, as our work hours do not fit into a school day.

Personal Statement 5.

Mrs #

Local resident

As residents of Ampleforth, it has come to our attention, the possible closure of St Hilda's primary school.

The closure of the school would most importantly negatively impact the children and their wellbeing, but also impact the village. If this was to go ahead, most of the children would be enrolled to St Benedict's on Back Lane

As we live on Back Lane, we see daily the absolute sheer carnage around school run times. Back lane is unsuitable for the amount of traffic and footfall that the school brings as it is. Without any added extra vehicles and extra footfall. It is purely dangerous with no footpath, causing children and adults to be all over the road. The line of parked cars causes issues every single day with the residents on back lane, and things such as bin wagons, delivery trucks, the post man etc. a major concern is emergency services cannot get past due to the cars parked along the road.

The road is also dangerous in itself, with extra-large potholes and ruts being caused by the traffic and is being made extremely muddy.

The extra children that will be enrolled in the school will cause health and safety issues along the road.

Not only this, but the children will be disrupted from their usual routine and familiar surroundings, which will make them feel unsettled and unsafe. Meaning they will not learn and progress as they should be doing.

St Benedict's class sizes will also get much bigger, which means the children will not be getting the right amount of support and time spent with them which they deserve, as the teachers will have so many children to focus on.

Surely the best option for the most important people, the children and their families, as well the village and its residents is for St Hilda's to remain open!

We support the campaign to keep St Hilda's open.

Personal Statement 6.

Recent former pupil

When I was in St Hilda's, I loved it there. The lessons were always fun and engaging (especially P.E.!) and the teachers were so supportive.

School trips were everything but boring! On my last school trip in year 6, we learnt how Roman soldiers lived and trained.

This school is a staple in my childhood and I miss it so much! I went through the whole system and it was great. I'm grateful for the friends I made along the way.

I'm now in my second year at Ryedale and progressing well thanks to my start at St Hilda's.

Personal Statement 7.

Ms#

Parent

Both my children are attending St Hilda's school in Ampleforth. They have been attending for the last three years. I am a single parent, I work full-time for the NHS. I work in Kirkbymoorside surgery and live in Ampleforth. I rely on the wraparound care in the village (Daisy daycare) in order to be able to work as I have no family nearby, and no live-in partner.

The consultation document states that Husthwaite school would be our catchment should St Hilda's close, this is in the opposite direction to my job and I would not be able to take my children there before work as I start at 8.30 am. I am learning on the job and have to do a minimum of 30 hours a week, so reducing my hours is not an option. I work until 5pm so if my children are forced to attend school at Husthwaite, I would not be able to collect them at the end of school. Not to mention the fact that St Hilda's is rated good by OFSTED, and Husthwaite is rated as 'needs improvement'.

I am not having my children go to a Catholic school, which is the only other option in the village. We are all Christened as C of E and do not support Catholic values. So, if St Hilda's is closed and my children are forced out, I will expect fully funded transport and wraparound care. I cannot be expected to leave my job because of a decision made by the council. I have been out of work for a long time due to mental health issues, and I found the drive to go back to work last September. To have to leave my job now after settling in and building relationships would be devastating for my self-esteem, not to mention the financial implications of going back on benefits. I am barely keeping my head above water with bills as it is.

Personal Statement 8.

Mrs #

Parent of Reception and Year 4 pupil

We were devastated to learn of the potential closure of St Hilda's. We had made the decision to move to Ampleforth to send our children to a 'Good' Church of England school and then on to the 'Excellent' Ryedale school. We have been in the village for over 5 years, and have been incredibly happy with our children's progress at the school. # (year 4) is achieving beyond his age expectations and # (reception) is also doing exceptionally well too. This is a credit to the teaching staff and their dedication and understanding of the needs of every single pupil. This level of learning will not be available anywhere else and will be lost forever.

There is not a 'Good' Ofsted rated Church of England school left in the area, and so children whose parents wish them to continue at a Church of England school will be forced to move to a potentially 'inadequate' school.

I wonder whether religious reasons would bear doubt on the closure of the Catholic school in the village should they find themselves in a similar situation.

The closure of the school would, I am sure, have a very detrimental effect on the children, as it did when I moved school when I was five years old and is still a standout moment in my life.

St Benedict's Catholic school in the village was actually created as somewhere for the children of parents working at Ampleforth college and Abbey to send their children. It is not the village school!

Ampleforth is the largest village in the area and is only growing, with further planned development for more family sized homes, I wonder where the council are going to bus these children to?

Should the closure happen I fear we would have to leave Ampleforth as decent schools and wrap around care would no longer be available for us, and this would also mean having to leave my job.

Personal Statement 9.

Mr and Mrs #

Local resident

As residents of Ampleforth we are very concerned to hear of the proposed closure of St Hilda's Primary School. The most important aspect of the whole issue surrounds the wellbeing of the children (current and future).

Presumably if this was to go ahead most of the children would be forced to enroll with the Catholic School in the Village, St Benedict's.

As a resident of Back Lane (Opposite the school), we have a ringside seat for the daily chaos which happens outside St Benedict's. Back Lane is an unadopted, unsurfaced road totally unsuitable for the footfall and vehicular traffic generated by the school.

In the 7 years we have lived here this has escalated to an unacceptable level during term time. There is no footpath beyond the Surgery and pedestrians are forced to walk in the centre of the road, the line of parked cars makes sure of this.

The whole thing is unsafe already and the addition of extra pupils would render a Health and Safety hazard to children which would be highly unacceptable. The road is rutted, extremely muddy in winter and congested to the point where the council recycling truck, oil tankers delivering to the households beyond the school, and grocery delivery vans cannot get through and often must reverse towards the surgery. We are very concerned as access to emergency vehicles such as ambulances and fire engines would be hampered by the school traffic and parking currently. With extra pupils the safety of not only the children, but the occupants of houses beyond school is further jeopardised.

Surely the best option is to keep children in St Hilda's, which does not have an access problem and where they are settled, happy and safe.

We completely support your campaign to keep children at St Hilda's open.

Personal Statement 10.

Mr and Mrs #

Parents of pre-school pupil

This statement is based on the impact the school has had on our family, and is not generally based on the evidence already provided in this report.

Our son has been attending preschool since October 2023. The welcome we have received from the school, and especially the infant class, has been nothing short of excellent. They've helped us gently settle him in, and his progression since starting has been remarkable.

He is excelling in the small class-size with brilliant teacher and teaching assistant provision who consistently engage him in interesting and educational play.

Losing the village primary school would be devastating for us as a family. We are not Catholic, and so St Ben's is not a viable alternative for us, which leaves Husthwaite school within catchment. I would be reluctant to put my 5-year-old (in Sept 2025) on a school bus for 20+ minutes each way, which means that we will need to reduce our work hours (reduced tax) and increase rural car journeys (increased emissions and cost).

St Hilda's is consistently rated as a 'Good' school (Ofsted), with Husthwaite provided as our alternative choice being in 'requires improvement' - this does not fulfil our right to have an equal or better alternative school and pre-school provision.

We use Daisy Day Care in the village for wraparound care on school days and would plan for this to continue when he starts at school. He has been there since he was 9 months old - it is his safe space which we value highly; however, if the school was to close, we would no longer be able to use Daisys which could significantly adversely impact this small business in our village. Neither Husthwaite or Helmsley schools have full-time or available spaces in their current wraparound care provision.

The temporary reduction in numbers has been brought about by poor previous headship and the worry of closure brought about by the closure of Hovingham School. That is obvious from the sudden sharp drop in pupil numbers, but the excellent (~6) number of predicted students for the 2025 intake and beyond indicates that the change in leadership is positive and there is a continued need for the school in the village. What is needed for St Hilda's is investment from NYC and stability - that, along with its already great reputation, will allow pupil numbers to rise again in the medium and long term so that the school can continue to serve the village now and as it grows in the future as a designated service village.

We chose St Hilda's for our child as a long-term provision - if St Hilda's closes, we genuinely have no good choice for alternative schooling either in catchment or the local area.

Personal Statement 11.

Mr and Mrs #

Village residents

Myself and my husband moved to the village three years ago. Because my husband works from home we had a lot of flexibility about where we chose to live. We drew a circle on the map and just started looking at houses. When we first visited a house in Ampleforth we drove down the road, past St Hilda's and Ampleforth immediately shot to the top of the list. No other place we viewed houses had what Ampleforth offers for a young family. A post office, doctors surgery with a dispensing pharmacy, bus route and a school within walking distance. I believe myself and my husband represent a new kind of demographic, young remote workers who choose to live rurally. Because my husband is Jewish St Benedict's would likely not accept our children and our children would be classed as "other children" in their acceptance process, ranking every other child above them. We would also have concerns about sending our children to a school with such a strong culture clash.

Without St Hilda's, Ampleforth will be less able to attract young people to the village, especially those from diverse backgrounds. Ampleforth is an incredibly vibrant community, we have resources and infrastructure that most rural villages dream of. It seems short-sighted and premature to close a thriving school because of a pessimistic projection of a small deficit, when anyone can see that alternative transport costs will likely cost the council more money in the long run.

Our future in the village is dependent upon the presence of St Hilda's and it's closure would make us strongly reassess our living situation and look at options which would offer us what Ampleforth currently does.

Personal Statement 12.

Ms #

Village resident

The closure of St. Hilda's primary school would be a great loss to Ampleforth. It is part of the fabric of the village and should be supported through this time where pupil intake is low. I attended the school from 1928 and I find it unbelievable that if the proposal is accepted, the school will shut in a matter of months.

It is very unfair on the children who currently are at the school. They are settled and happy and receiving a good education. Travel to other schools will make their days longer and will tear them away from their friends.

Parents have work commitments and have routines in place where their children are cared for before and after school. What will happen if they are forced to find school places outside the village?

We should value our rural schools and ensure their existence for many more years to come. Primary education (and especially good primary education) is crucial to the backbone of society. I personally will be very sad to see St. Hilda's no longer educating the young of Ampleforth and its surrounding areas.



Dear Sir or Madam.

It has come to our attention that there is a proposal to close St Hilda's CE Primary School in Ampleforth. North Yorkshire.

We would like to show our support to keep this wonderful School open. St Hilda's' is such a warm friendly School and is a big part of the community.

At Daisy Day Care, we have provided 'Wrap around care' for many of the children of St Hilda's since April 2009. The proposed closure of St Hilda's' would affect us greatly, not only financially but also the prospect of future children coming to us with the intention of then going on to St Hilda's'.

We have younger children with us at the moment who are intending to go to St Hilda's in the future and feel that their only other option would be to attend another School nearby (St Benedict's) which is not suitable for their children. It is of a different religion and due to its very large class sizes and hazardous parking facilities would not be suitable.

We understand that numbers have dropped in recent years at St Hilda's and we know from our own experiences with the previous Head Teacher, that he was the reason for many parents choosing to move to a different School! With him leaving we feel that the School has worked tirelessly to gain the parents trust and deserves a chance to build up numbers again.

This will not happen overnight but Ampleforth has more and more families moving into the area. The nearest School (St Benedict's) will very soon be full to capacity, the road and lack of footpath leading up to it is not suitable or safe for any more children. We also provide 'Wrap around care' for St Benedict's School and experience firsthand how hazardous it is at drop off and collection time!

We ask you to please take all our comments into consideration as we do not want to lose such a valuable asset to Ampleforth. Kind

Regards

Tracy Hutchinson

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