

Statutory Proposals

Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Statutory proposals for school closures

*The information below must be included in a proposal to close a school:
Under Schedule 2 to the Establishment and Discontinuance Regulations.*

Contact details

The name and contact details of the LA or governing body publishing the proposal and the name, address and category of the school proposed for closure.

The Governing Body of Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School intends to discontinue Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hesley Lane, Rathmell, Settle, North Yorkshire, BD24 0LA.

Rathmell Church of England (Voluntary Aided) Primary School is a 4-11 voluntary aided primary school in North Yorkshire.

Implementation

The date on which it is proposed to close the school or, where it is proposed that the closure be implemented in stages, the dates of and information about each stage.

Proposed date of closure is 31st August 2017.

Reason for closure

A statement explaining the reason why closure of the school is considered necessary.

There are two key concerns: falling pupil numbers, and the school's financial position

1) Falling pupil numbers

The number of children at Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School has been falling steadily over the past few years from 41 in 2012/13 to 19 in September 2016. It is forecast that these numbers will fall further still to an expected 15 in September 2017. The school is designated to accommodate up to 63 pupils. Forecasts indicate that these numbers will not recover significantly in the longer term and may reduce further still.

2) The school's financial position

Pupil numbers determine the school budget. Even at a roll of 19 the school was running an in-year deficit of £11,210 in 2016/17. Due to further reduced pupil numbers the 2017/18 forecast indicated an in-year deficit of £65,500 increasing to a £76,530 deficit by 2018/19 with no prospect of recovery.

Pupil numbers and admissions

The numbers (distinguishing between compulsory and non-compulsory school age pupils), age range, sex, and special educational needs of pupils (distinguishing between boarding and day pupils) for whom provision is currently made at the school.

There were 19 pupils on roll at the start of this academic year of the following age groups and genders:

	Rec	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
Boys	1	0	1	3	2	2	4	13
Girls	0	1	2	1	0	0	2	6
	Infants			Juniors				19

The school's age range is 4-11 years, and provision is available for boys and girls. There is no boarding provision. Information on special educational needs of the pupils has not been provided due to the small cohort size as this detailed information would contravene the Data Protection Act. Total pupil numbers are significantly lower than the capacity of the school which is designed to accommodate up to 63 pupils.

Displaced pupils

A statement and supporting evidence about the need for school places in the area including whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils.

Details of the schools or further education colleges at which pupils at the school to be discontinued will be offered places, including—

a) any interim arrangements;

b) the provision that is to be made for those pupils who receive educational provision recognised by the local authority as reserved for children with special educational needs; and

c) in the case of special schools, the alternative provision made by local authorities other than the local authority which maintain the school.

Details of any other measures proposed to be taken to increase the number of school or further education college places available in consequence of the proposed discontinuance.

It is proposed that from 1st September 2017 the area currently served by Long Preston Endowed Voluntary Aided Primary School will serve Rathmell CE VA Primary School. Long Preston Endowed Voluntary Aided Primary School is 4½ miles from Rathmell. It currently has 60 pupils on roll and a capacity of 84. This is a Church of England school. The last published Ofsted inspection was made in October 2012. This report judged the school as Good.

There are two other primary schools in the local area:

Settle CE Voluntary Controlled Primary School is 3 miles from Rathmell. It currently has 177 pupils on roll and a capacity of 210. The last published Ofsted inspection was made in January 2016. This report judged the school as Good.

Giggleswick Community Primary is 3 miles from Rathmell. It currently has 71 pupils on roll and a capacity of 90. The last published Ofsted inspection was made in November 2016. This report judged the school as Good.

For any children currently at Rathmell CE VA Primary School, North Yorkshire County Council would work with each family to try to meet their individual preferences for other schools.

Parents have a right to express a preference for any school and, in the case of community and voluntary controlled schools, the relevant Local Authority is the admissions authority and will meet that preference provided there are vacant places. In the case of Voluntary Aided schools, the governing body decide the conditions for admission to their particular school. Where a child attends a school which is not their normal school or nearest school, parents are normally responsible for making transport arrangements.

Impact on the community

A statement and supporting evidence about the impact on the community of the closure of the school and any measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impact.

The Young Farmers club currently use the school hall on occasions during the year. There is also a pre-school group that runs from the school premises but this will not continue after the summer term due to viability issues. The staffroom has previously been designated as a rural access point for any groups in the area but was never used. Locally there is the Rathmell Reading Rooms that is available for hire and already provide a centre for village life. Given the small number of

community uses of the school premises, and the alternative venues available locally, the potential impact of the loss of the school as a community venue should be minimal.

The school building is not owned by the County Council. Decisions about disposal of the school site and buildings will be taken by the owners of the site after the closure proposal has been determined. The matter needs to be referred to the Secretary of State. Rathmell School Trustees will act in the best interests of the children of the current Rathmell School catchment area in any matters for which they are responsible.

Balance of denominational provision

Where the school has a designated religious character, a statement about the impact of the proposed closure on the balance of denominational provision and impact on parental choice in the area.

Rathmell is a Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. If the proposal is approved, the area currently served by the school would in future be served by another Church of England school, Long Preston Endowed Voluntary Aided Primary School. This proposal is not therefore considered to have a detrimental impact on the balance of denomination provision and parental choice in the area.

Rural primary schools

Where proposals relate to a rural primary school designated as such by an order made for the purposes of Section 15 (Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA), a statement that the local authority or the governing body (as the case may be) considered Section 15(4) EIA.

As Rathmell CE VA 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:

- The likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;
- Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools
- The availability and likely cost to the LA of transport to other schools;
- Any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result in the discontinuance of the school and the likely effects of any such increase; and
- Any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school

These are examined in turn below.

The likely effect of closure of the school on the community

Please see the section above 'Impact on the Community'

Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools

The most recent Ofsted inspection was in June 2013 when there were 41 children on roll. In September, there are forecast to be only 4 children in Class 1. It will become increasingly difficult to meet children's educational and social needs even with the existing partnerships with other local schools in the cluster.

The impact of falling numbers is a concern, and although standards have been good and were judged as such at the last Ofsted inspection, sustaining this with such low numbers is a challenge.

Declining numbers make it difficult to ensure that pupils have the necessary breadth of social experiences, sufficient peer interaction and the opportunity for children to work in groups.

It is therefore proposed that Long Preston Endowed VA Primary School's catchment area should be extended with effect from 1st September 2017 to serve the area currently served by Rathmell. Long Preston Endowed VA Primary School was rated by Ofsted as a good school at its last Ofsted inspection in October 2012. It is not considered that the proposed closure of Rathmell CE VA Primary School would have any detrimental effect on standards at neighbouring schools.

The availability and likely cost to the LA, of transport to other schools and any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase

The County Council's Home to School transport policy sets out that free school transport will be provided to the catchment school or nearest school to a child's home address if it is over the statutory walking distances set out by law. This is:

- Two miles for children under eight years of age;
- Three miles for children aged over eight; or
- where the route to the catchment or nearest school is not safe to walk accompanied by a responsible adult.

If the nearest catchment or nearest school is full, transport will be provided, in accordance with the authority's transport policy, to the nearest school with places available.

Children from low income families (children entitled to free school meals or whose parent are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit) have additional eligibility criteria for additional home to school transport and details are available on the County Council's website at <http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/article/26071/School---travel-support>

There is also additional eligibility criteria for transport to denominational schools (details available on the County Council's website) but this will change in 2018.

Staff from the County Council's Admissions and Transport team have met with parents at Rathmell School during the consultation period to advise on individual implications to parents. If a parent is informed that they are not entitled to transport they may, if they wish, contact the Transport Team in writing with their particular individual circumstances, which would be reviewed by Senior Officers before an appeal would be offered.

It should be noted that due to the way that the home to school transport policy operates, if Rathmell School closed, and Long Preston Endowed was designated as the catchment area school, some parents living in Rathmell village would qualify for transport to Giggleswick CP as it would be the nearest school.

If Long Preston Endowed were to become the catchment school there would be no significant increase in the cost of home to school transport as the current cost of transport to Rathmell (circa £30,000 per year) would transfer to Long Preston.

If pupils living nearer an alternative school chose to attend that school they would be offered an allowance of 30p per mile for 4 journeys a day. If they were unable to accept the allowance then additional transport would be required at an approximate cost of £19,000 per year.

If it is agreed to close Rathmell CE Primary School then the County Council would work with individual families of children attending Rathmell CE School to look to accommodate their preferences for alternative schools where possible. Discretion can be exercised where appropriate in providing support for home to school transport outside the criteria set out in the policy.

Any alternatives to the closure of the school

The Governing Body and officers from the County Council and Diocese have explored alternatives to the closure of the school. It is considered that there is no potential for the school to convert to academy status or to join a multi-academy trust because it would not meet tests of due diligence due to its small size and financial position. The fundamental issues of very low numbers, leading to lack of curriculum breadth remain.

Whilst collaboration between schools can enrich children's educational experiences to some extent and lead to sharing of resources or services it cannot guarantee the security of a school, which has reached a critical level in terms of pupil numbers, without other forms of support or intervention. The Governing Body has examined potential federations with other local schools and considered that this would not secure the future of educational provision at the school in the longer term.

Maintained nursery schools

Not applicable

Provision for 16-19 year olds

Not applicable

Special educational needs (SEN) provision

The existing provision at Rathmell is not reserved for pupils with special educational needs.

Travel

The proposed arrangements for travel of displaced pupils to other schools including how the proposed arrangements will work to limit increased car use.

Eligibility for home to school transport will be determined in line with the County Council's current home to school transport policy and procedures based on each child's home address and individual circumstances.

Where a child attends a school which is not their normal school or nearest school, parents are normally responsible for making transport arrangements.

There are other schools within reasonable travelling distance with places available currently. Settle CE VA Primary School is 3 miles away, Long Preston Endowed VA School is 4.5 miles away and Giggleswick Community Primary is 3 miles away.

Parents will be reminded of the County Council's home to school transport policy when considering alternative schools. Pupils up to the age of 8 would normally be eligible for free home to school transport if they live more than 2 miles from their normal area school (or 3 miles for those over the age of 8). Parents can always express a preference for a school other than their normal area school however they would usually be responsible for making transport arrangements. Eligibility is assessed on an individual basis taking into account the child's home address.

North Yorkshire County Council's Home to School transport policy states that 'Transport will be arranged so that children will not normally spend more than 1 hour 15 minutes travelling to a secondary school or 45 minutes to a primary school. Journey times might need to be longer than this in some more rural areas and where road or weather conditions mean that these times are not practical.' This is in line with statutory guidance from the Department for Education. The journey time for children living within the current Rathmell CE VA Primary School catchment area would depend on which other school they attended and their home address, but as noted above, the journey from Rathmell to Long Preston Endowed Primary School is approximately 9 minutes and the distance is 4.5 miles.

Consultation

Decision-makers will need to be assured that consultation has taken place, and that the statutory process has been adhered to. Therefore proposals should include evidence that the period of statutory consultation took place, and the results of that consultation.

The decision to consult was taken by the Governing Body on the 7th February 2017. A consultation period ran from 17 February to 24 March 2017. Consultation documents were sent to all parents of pupils at Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, to staff, and to governing bodies of other local primary and secondary schools, as well as to local Councillors, the Diocese, local parish and district councils, unions and professional associations and the local MP.

A public meeting was held at the school on 2nd March 2017 and was attended by 45 members of the community.

The consultation document is attached, together with the consultation responses and notes of the public meeting.

Procedure for making representations (objections and comments)

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal, any person may object to or make comments on the proposal by sending them to Corporate Director - Children and Young People's Service, North Yorkshire County Council, County Hall, Northallerton, DL7 8AE by 5pm on 8th June 2017.

Appendix 1: Consultation Paper

Appendix 2: List of the Consultees

Appendix 3: Notes of the Public Meeting

Appendix 4: Consultation Responses

Governing Body of Rathmell CE VA Primary School



Consultation Document

Proposal to close Rathmell Church of England

Voluntary Aided Primary School

from 31 August 2017

Dear Parent/Guardian

This letter is part of a formal procedure the Governing Body at Rathmell has very reluctantly embarked on. As most of you will have learned before you read this, we are consulting towards the closure of Rathmell CE Primary School with effect from August 31st 2017.

As you will know, we have not taken this decision lightly, but rather it follows much deliberation and exploring of the range of possibilities. The decision has been made unanimously by all governors, with the best interests of the children in school now and in the foreseeable future at the forefront of our thinking.

We know this will raise many questions about the future, many of which we have spent many hours over ourselves. Some of these questions will have been addressed in the process of informing everyone immediately affected, however as part of the process we are holding a meeting to which all are welcome from the local and school community on Thursday March 2nd at 6pm at the school.

Enclosed with this letter please find the formal Consultation Document required of us which gives a timeline for the process we are initiating as well as a good deal of information on the school's current and projected situation. It explains how to respond on your own behalf or on behalf of an organisation for which you are an authorised representative.

We are very proud of the quality of education and the ethos of our school and wish to celebrate and maintain both for as long as possible. As has always been the case, children at our school will be taking part in lessons and events and activities designed to give them the best educational experience to the end of this academic year and to prepare them for the next academic year wherever that is for them.

Governors have taken this decision with deep sadness and without pressure from either the Diocese or the Local Authority, in response to financial and social factors beyond the control of any of us. We greatly value the support of our parents and local community, and look to work together for the best for our children.

Yours sincerely

Hilary Young, Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Governors of Rathmell CE VA Primary School

Rathmell C of E (VA) Primary School

February 2017

This paper sets out details of a proposal to close Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School with effect from 31 August 2017. It gives the background to the proposal. There will be a public meeting on:

Thursday 2nd March 2017 at 6pm

at Rathmell CE VA Primary School



The Current Position

The Governing Body of Rathmell Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School has decided to consult on a proposal to close the school. This decision has been made unanimously.

The Governors have worked closely with staff from the Diocese of Leeds and North Yorkshire County Council. They consider that the closure is necessary to secure the interests of current and future pupils from the school because pupil numbers have fallen to a level where it will be difficult to continue to provide a high quality of education for pupils.

The Governing Body has not reached this decision lightly and has already considered and worked with alternatives, such as collaborating with other schools to make sure that good standards of teaching and learning will be available for all pupils.

There are two concerns:

- 1) Very low pupil numbers
- 2) The school's financial position

Pupil Numbers

The number of children at Rathmell CE VA Primary School has been falling gradually over the past few years. There are now only 19 pupils on roll and these are projected to fall to just 15 in September. The school is designed to accommodate up to 63 pupils. Forecasts indicate that these numbers will not recover significantly in the longer term and may reduce still further.

In these circumstances, it is difficult to preserve the quality of education.

The most recent Ofsted inspection was in June 2013 when there were 41 children on roll. In September, there are forecast to be only 4 children in Class 1. It will become increasingly

difficult to meet children's educational and social needs even with the existing partnerships with other local schools in the cluster.

The Financial Position

Pupil numbers determine the school budget. With these lower numbers, and a reduced budget, the school will have to further reduce staff. To continue for even one more year will inevitably result in dramatic changes to our work. To continue beyond that will result in an illegal deficit budget, with no reasonable prospect of recovery.

The Proposal

For the reasons above it is proposed that Rathmell CE VA Primary School should close with effect from 31 August 2017.

The catchment area of another local school will be extended to include the current Rathmell School catchment area. The results of this consultation will be taken into account in the final designation.

For children currently at Rathmell School, North Yorkshire County Council will work with each family to try to meet their individual preferences for other schools regardless of the catchment area defined, and Rathmell School staff and governors are committed to supporting families in their choice of school and in making a smooth transition.

There are places available at Long Preston Endowed Voluntary Aided School, Settle CE VC Primary School

and Giggleswick Community Primary School. All these schools have been judged 'Good' (as has our school) at their most recent published OFSTED inspections, and will work with Rathmell School to enable smooth transition for our children.

Eligibility for home-to-school transport will be determined in line with the County Council's current home-to-school transport policy and procedures, based on each child's home address and individual circumstances.

Parents have a right to express a preference for any school and, in the case of community and voluntary controlled schools, the relevant Local Authority is the admissions authority and will meet that preference, provided there are vacant places or the school is happy to admit above the published admission number. In the case of Voluntary Aided schools, the governing body decides the conditions for admission to their particular school. Where a child attends a school, which is not their normal school or nearest school, parents are normally responsible for making transport arrangements.

North Yorkshire County Council's Admissions Team is always happy to give advice to parents – please contact Vickie Hemming-Allen 01609 535481 or Lisa Herdman 01609 534953.

Staff

A separate consultation process, including a staff meeting, is running in

parallel with the consultation on the closure proposal.

The Building

The school building is not owned by the County Council. Decisions about disposal of the school site and buildings will be taken by the owners of the site after the closure proposal has been determined. The matter needs to be referred to the Secretary of State. Rathmell School Trustees will act in the best interests of the children of the current Rathmell School catchment area in any matters for which they are responsible.

What Happens Next?

Your views about this proposal are welcomed. You can either complete and return the attached response sheet, or submit an online response

Paper responses should be returned to North Yorkshire County Council, who are administering this consultation on behalf of the governors of the school, at the address below:

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
Rathmell
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire County Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON
DL7 8AE

Online responses may be submitted by following this link:

<https://consult.northyorks.gov.uk/snap/webhost/s.asp?k=148664121252>

The closing date for responses is **24 March 2017**. All responses to the consultation received by this date will

be considered by the School's Governing Body in April 2017.

If the Governing Body decides to proceed with the closure proposal, then statutory notices would be published in the local press in May. These notices provide a further four weeks for representations to be made. A final decision would be made by North Yorkshire County Council's Executive Committee in June 2017. If agreed the school would close on 31 August 2017.

Key Dates

All dates are subject to approvals at each stage.

Consultation opens	Fri 17 February 2017
Public meeting at the school	Thu March 2 nd At 6:00 pm
Consultation closes	Fri 24 March 2017
Governing body considers consultation response	April 2017
Statutory Notices published (4 weeks for representations to be made)	May 2017
Final decision by NYCC	June 2017
School closure	31 August 2017

Appendix 2

Rathmell CE VA Primary School - List of Consultees

Parents of pupils:

Staff of school:

Governors of school:

Church of England Diocese of Leeds: Richard Noake, Diocesan Director

Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of other local primary and secondary schools
with a 5 mile radius of school:

Giggleswick Primary

Long Preston Endowed VA Primary

Settle CE

Hellifield CP

Settle College

Unions and Professional Associations

Interest / user groups nominated by the school

Local county councillors Richard Welch

District councillors:

Wendy Hull

David Michael Staveley

Local district: Craven District Council

Local MP Julian Smith

Secretary of State

Notes of Public Meeting concerning Rathmell CE (VA) Primary School

Thursday 2nd March 2017 at Rathmell CE VA Primary School

Present: Christine Boxall -Headteacher
Hilary Young -Chair of Governors
Simone Bennett -Diocese of Leeds
Simon Ashby -North Yorkshire County Council, Education & Skills
John Lee -North Yorkshire County Council, Strategic Planning
Julia Temple -North Yorkshire County Council, Strategic Planning

Together with parents, members of staff, headteachers/governors of local schools, trustees, members of the village community and Parish Councillors.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Hilary Young opened the meeting shortly after 6pm with a prayer and welcomed everyone to the meeting. The rest of the panel were introduced; Christine Boxall (headteacher of Rathmell CE VA Primary School), Simone Bennett (Church of England Diocese of Leeds), Simon Ashby (School Improvement Advisor, NYCC), John Lee (Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC) and Julia Temple (Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC) to take notes of the meeting.

2. Opening Remarks

Hilary introduced the consultation document and explained the purpose of the meeting was to consult on closure of the school with effect from 31st August 2017. Hilary went on to describe the difficult decision that has been taken by the Governing Body. A decision that has not been taken lightly, but only after considerable time and effort had been spent exploring alternative possibilities. It is with great sadness that closure of the school is considered necessary in order to secure the best interests of current and future pupils to ensure they continue to receive a high quality education. Unfortunately the school is not alone; other schools including Horton in Ribblesdale CE VA Primary School are facing similar challenges due to falling pupil numbers.

Hilary explained that no pressure has been put on the Governors by the Local Authority to consult on closure. The decision has been made unanimously and the timing is a wish of the Governing Body and Headteacher to close at the end of the school year to assist with the transition of pupils to alternative

schools. Governors have asked that an alternative school is not named at this stage as views and comments received during the consultation period would be taken into consideration.

John Lee confirmed that this is not a decision that has been taken by the Local Authority and that should closure occur there would be no financial saving to the County Council. However, the LA is assisting the Governing Body in managing the process. The closing date for consultation responses is the 24th March, following that the Governing Body will meet in April to consider these responses and decide if statutory processes for closure are to begin. This would involve publishing statutory notices in the local press and on the school gates in May. These notices would then provide a further four weeks for representations to be made. A final decision would then be made by the County Council's Executive Committee in June 2017. The Local Authority would welcome views on alternative schools should Rathmell close if parents have any particular preferences.

Simone Bennett requested the members of the public in attendance to hold in their thoughts the angst and extremely difficult decision that has been taken, and to be mindful that the people who have made this decision have done so with integrity and with the best interests of the children in the forefront of their thoughts at all times.

3. Questions and Comments

Does it have to be a unanimous decision by Governors? Hilary responded to say no, only a majority.

Where did the original thought on closure come from? Hilary said this came about following a number of considerations around numbers of pupils and the effect of those low numbers on the school. Alternatives such as federation have also been looked into.

A comment was made around children having to travel further and the effect the closure will have on the community. Hilary responded to say that the Governors have a duty primarily towards the education of the children. Simon Ashby said that the first meeting he attended was not about closure, it was about providing quality education to the pupils.

How many pupils are needed to make the school viable? A further comment was that this school has seen low numbers in the past and has recovered; it's a cycle, why do we not think it will do the same again? Hilary said that we cannot be sure the cycle is still happening and we cannot afford to wait to see if numbers will increase. Forecasts show that it is

unlikely in the near future and unfortunately we cannot foresee what will happen beyond that.

Could housing impact on future numbers? Unfortunately the school can't survive for even another year with current numbers. The general pattern of demography shows that families are moving into towns. There is only a small number of housing planned for the area and they tend to be expensive and unaffordable for young families.

A comment was made that the LA needs to look at the bigger picture as Settle Primary does not have enough capacity. John Lee responded to say that there are other nearby primary schools with spare capacity. In terms of housing the LA works closely with Craven District Council on housing allocations within the Local Plan. On average every four new houses generates one child. Pupil forecasts take future new housing into consideration as part of the calculation. Hilary added that Settle CE Primary School is not currently full.

A further comment was made around migration. The general trend is that families are moving into towns. Hilary confirmed that the wider picture has been looked at.

Would the Council provide transport for pupils from Horton-in-Ribblesdale to Rathmell? John Lee responded to say no as the County Council has an agreed transport policy which it has to follow.

It was suggested that having no local school would push house prices down which would be more attractive to families to move into. There is no evidence to suggest that not having a school in a village has a significant effect on lowering house prices.

A member of the public asked what had been done in terms of looking at alternatives such as federation or amalgamation. Simon Ashby explained that these have been looked at and although these arrangements can offer some economies it would not be enough in this situation. This school would not be attractive to an academy sponsor due to its financial position. For a few years now the school has been running at a deficit. Last year it came to the end of its carry forward budget which means it is now showing a deficit budget with no means of recovery. As a small school it is very difficult to recover from the deficit as they cannot reduce staff as easily as larger schools.

There was a question around how many pupils would be needed at the school to make it viable. Hilary said that the school would need another 15

children next year to be in a place where it might survive. Christine added that the Government considers a small school to be one with 210 pupils or less.

A comment was made that it is such a big loss to the community. Hilary responded that communities can continue to do well even without a local school. A member of the public asked if evidence can be provided to show which communities have thrived without a school. Hilary responded to say that information cannot be provided at this meeting but there have been other communities that have lost their school and have not suffered because of it.

A parent expressed their concern around their child not knowing pupils at other schools they may have to attend. Another parent asked if they could have some guidance on the transition process for the children. Hilary responded on behalf of the Governors to say they would support both staff and pupils in their move to other schools and would be happy to facilitate meetings with the headteachers of other schools in the area and the County Council's Admissions Team. Christine said that transition arrangements would be put in place over the summer as they do now with year 6 pupils when moving on to a new school.

Further concerns were raised by parents about their children settling into a new school and asked if all their school reports would be transferred. Christine said that yes usually the reports would be sent electronically to their new school. Simone reiterated that a transition journey for the children would be implemented and would be well managed.

A parent asked if they could have some clarity from the Local Authority on whether any other local schools are likely to face closure in the near future. John responded to say that the County Council worked hard to support small schools but it was not possible to give guarantees about the future of any school.

A reference was made to the recent article in the Yorkshire Post written by the Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs and a suggestion that the Diocese does not support small schools. Simone responded to say this is not the case at all, and was not the view expressed in this article. Although the Diocese does not have financial responsibility for schools, they will continue to support them in whatever way they can.

A parent asked how bus routes would be decided. John Lee said the LA would apply a policy based on catchment area and that transport colleagues would be available to assist parents with this. An alternative school has not been designated at this time. **A further comment was made that time on a**

bus as well as distance needs to be a consideration. Simone said it would be useful to have that as part of a consultation response.

Does it have to be a majority decision on which school is the designated school? This is a decision that will be made by the Local Authority and parents are being asked for their views on this to help inform that decision. Distances are calculated using designated road routes.

What happens to equipment and buildings if the school was to close? In terms of equipment the usual process is to offer it first to other local schools, nurseries and playgroups. Then it would be offered to charities. If there are any particular pieces that have local connections, perhaps that were gifted to the school and would be of benefit to the community, if that could be made known to the headteacher, then that can be taken into consideration during the closure process. The Diocese is currently looking into the ownership of the school land and buildings. **A further comment was made in relation to a strip of land that was sold when an extension was built.** Again, if that information could form part of a consultation response it can then be looked into.

A member of the community asked why staff numbers and costs weren't reduced years ago to save on resources. Hilary explained there are strict rules around school funding and the amount they are allowed to carry forward into future years. The government funding they receive each year is there to be spent on the children they have in school at that time and it cannot be saved for a future date.

A member of the community said what a shock it was to be told of the proposed closure and asked why it was kept such a secret. Hilary explained that Governors made a decision not to publicise it too widely as often once that information is out in the public it has the effect of increasing the pace of reduced numbers as parents opt not to send their children to the school and essentially bringing about what they are trying to avoid. For those that are involved with the school on a day to day basis this has not come as a surprise as falling numbers has been a concern for some time.

There were various comments made about it being an ageing community and that planners need to encourage more affordable housing. Hilary said that may be true but it is not within the scope of this meeting to address those kind of issues.

4. Closing Remarks

Hilary closed the meeting and expressed thanks to all those involved and to the members of the community who had come along to the meeting.

Christine said she would be happy to facilitate a meeting at the school to assist parents with choosing an alternative school should a decision be made to close.

<u>Observations and/or suggestions:</u>	<u>Interest/Status e.g. Parent /Governor /Teacher/ Community</u>
<p>This is yet another nail in the coffin of rural villages in N Yorks. Take out the school/ focal point of village life and the village dies. We have lost Langcliffe, Settle Middle School and a possibility of losing Horton in Ribblesda primary school. I would strongly object and suggest this is being done too hastily and not enough thought has gone into saving the school and supporting it to keep the community alive and vibrant which surely is one of the objectives of a County Council. I would have expected at least a years notice giving the community time to work towards deciding on how to save and keep the school open.</p>	County Councillor
<p>Like everyone else, we're extremely sad that Rathmell School may close - it has been fantastic, on every level, for our son, and we looked forward to our younger son (3) going there too. But we totally understand the reasons behind the consultation and possible closure. If, at this late stage, it is felt that anything could still be done, or tried, by us as parents/teachers/neighbours/governors/etc to try to attract more pupils and families, and to keep the school open, we would be more than willing to help! Heartfelt thanks to all involved!</p>	Parents & community & tenants.
<p>Although this is a very sad situation, I understand the challenges that the school faces in meeting the educational and social needs of the local children with so few children on roll. With regret, I do support the decision of the Governors to close Rathmell School.</p>	Parent
<p>The proposal to close Rathmell School as of the end of the current academic year appears on the face of it to be hasty and ill-considered. The news comes as a great shock to a large proportion of the local community, including in some cases the School Trustees who themselves only found out a week or so before the public meeting on 02/03/2017. The School Governors, who apparently have been discussing this for some time, argue that to have made the possible closure public earlier would have precipitated closure. With closure now imminent anyway, that argument would appear to be irrelevant. How much better it would have been to make the local community aware of the situation and engage people in a positive process to try and keep our village school open. There has been an active establishment of primary education on this site since 1869 – a span of 148 years, which has brought great benefit to the parish of Rathmell, the families who have lived there and their children, the local institutions such as the Reading Room and of course in particular the Parish Church. To remove that long-standing institution from the community is a huge step for the Governors to take, and I would urge them to think again, because the decision may in years to come appear to have been the wrong one. The decision to close is based on the number of pupils currently attending the school and the predicted numbers over the next year or two. The decline in numbers has been a swift one; only a few years ago there were 40 or 50 pupils and the school was regarded as a beacon of village primary education with a bright future. If there had been a dwindling number of pupils over a longer period say 15-20 years, then there might be an argument for saying the school was in terminal decline. But such a steep decline could be mirrored by an equally sharp increase again, particularly given the government's strategy for providing more local housing, which with appropriate planning control could bring young families into the area. Predictions of future pupil numbers are bound to be unreliable – it could be that in 5 or 10 years time we have many young families in our community but sadly no school any longer for them to attend. The feeling conveyed by the public meeting on March 2nd was that the decision to close the school in effect has already been taken and that this consultation is merely a case of going through the motions of that decision. But if, as stated in the consultation document the decision has been made independently by the Governors without influence from the Diocese or the Education Authority, I would appeal to each one of the governors to consider very carefully the huge import of what they are doing here. The process appears to be rushed: look at possible ways of keeping going for a couple more years and then see how the land lies. Yes there may be difficulties with staffing and small class sizes, but it is still probably a preferable education to the one the children might get at a larger more anonymous institution.</p>	Community

I write this response as a resident in Rathmell village for many years, and also because my two children attended Rathmell School in the period 1985 - 1991. I feel as though this consultation has been rushed through and that the local community have been given very little opportunity to air their views, partly because the Governors voted unanimously on their preferred outcome, and therefore one feels that the input from the local community is viewed as largely superfluous. One of the two concerns expressed in the consultation document was very low pupil numbers, and that it is - 'not possible to meet children's educational and social needs' - I have had two children at Rathmell School, my daughter attended the School in a period when school numbers were low. - 19 in the School. I can categorically state that the education they received at Rathmell School was second to none, and that they have both gone on to achieve high academic successes and have also developed into good citizens. I can also cite many other examples of pupils who have attended the School, through the years, and who have also achieved great successes in all walks of life.

Past Parent/Community

The Consultation Doc says: "There are two concerns: 1) Very low pupil numbers 2) The school's financial position". First, we were told in the public meeting of 2 March '17 by John Leigh (Lea) that they had asked CDC re planning, and were told there were 25 current and 25 planned houses being built in the catchment area, providing (by their calculations) 12 more children to this school. With the current number at 19 a further 12 equals 31 pupils. The number could be higher. In the actual village there are some 10 houses almost finished and another 15-20 planned within 2 years. Rev Young said at this meeting, on being asked, that the school could survive on 20 pupils. She later upped this figure to 30, and then 50! - However, by Mr Leigh's forecast of numbers likely, compared with her own (first 2) forecast of numbers needed, the school looks to be in a healthy position, not one of necessary closure! With such obvious increases to the number of children in the village imminent, coupled with the complex social interactions of the parts of the village (see below) which make it a COMMUNITY and not a residential village, it is hard to see that the Governors genuinely have "already considered and worked with alternatives" other than ways in which to close the school. In fact, the evidence would suggest that the school has a good future life ahead of it, if it had leaders who believed in it and were creative in enticing even more pupils in. So, their first claim doesn't stand up. Second, the true extent of the school's financial position was, we were told by Rev Young at the meeting, not disclosed over the last 2 or 3 years so "as not to cause panic amongst the community" and trigger parents taking their kids out of school. I would suggest that the community was not able to help in any way if they were kept ignorant of the true extent of the situation: yes, everyone knew numbers were going down, but by the time it gets to a public 'what can we do' meeting the community expects the time has come to gird its loins and rally to save it, not to be told 'the show's over'. The people at that meeting were in deep shock. The Trustees said at the meeting that they had no idea of the situation, and you could hear the tremble of emotions in peoples' voices as they spoke. The school had a rope around its neck, was standing on the scaffold, and the Chair was saying "Right: tell us why we shouldn't pull the lever?". The village was given just 3 more weeks in which to come up with a viable solution or else the closure would go ahead. This is scandalous. I personally have lived through 4 vicars in the village, and 3 of them have tried hard to close down or sell-off our community buildings (Rev Rhodes/Wigglesworth school building in 1990s; Rev Yorkstone/Rathmell School House in 2000s; Rev Young in 2017) and the first 2 failed due to public opposition. But we were told at the meeting that the situation was such that the school could not stay open for "even one more year": how does that give the community a chance to save it? How is that not a fait accompli (as was so hotly denied at the meeting)? Rathmell has always been, and remains even in the 21st century, a place where people live and work and play together: the farming community educates its children in the school and is closely involved in all social events in the village alongside newcomers and non-farming residents. The school helps the church because of the childrens' involvement. Villagers support school events. Newcomers lend their knowledge on committees and with other types of help. The Reading Room hosts events and provides a venue for social, funereal and administrative activities across the age groups and social levels. It is a village of all ages and provides involvement for all ages. It is a balance, a connectivity of give and take, and it has had its crises and it has had to adapt over the years. But it has always thrived. By closing the school in such an abrupt manner, a major component of the village is torn away, with all the associated benefits and opportunities for interaction that go with it – and how long will the church survive without its school helping to keep it alive? The ramifications are huge, and I'm sorry, but the public meeting of 2 March did absolutely nothing at all to convince people that all the aspects I have detailed above, of housing, of finance and of community have been respected or given detailed examination. In fact the evidence would suggest a hasty, ill advised and inconsistent approach to the subject of Rathmell school, and a decision taken to close it despite the presence of evidence that could secure its future.

ex parent; ex Governor;
Community