

# CLAPHAM & DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



School special, May 2019

## Our school stays open!



They said it would never happen, but the community and Governors have fought off the threat to close Clapham Primary School.

The proposal to close the school was first reported in the newsletter in February: dates were set out for a consultation, a series of council decisions were in the diary and closure was going to happen at the end of August. The mood became even gloomier when local people sat in the village hall at the start of March. They heard a downbeat assessment of the school's potential. But even then, there was a nagging doubt: the council officers had simply got their numbers wrong. In their calculations they had missed over half of the new houses being built and they had clearly never heard of the Ingleborough Estate and its housing policies.

First one voice was raised, 'lets form a steering group like we did to save the shop'. Others joined in and, by the end of the evening, many had stepped forward. The challenge was simple: to see whether the school did have a future if the correct numbers were used.

The steering group began to meet, changed its name to the 'action group' and worked out its strategy: avoid high-visibility jackets, no standing on the side of the A65 holding banners and no shouting at Councillors to make them change their mind; instead the group decided to work quietly, meeting with key Councillors and giving them measured and reasonable arguments for keeping the school open.

The constructive approach was backed by a vigorous

effort to get the story into the press and on TV; the Yorkshire Post and Look North Leeds were particularly targeted so that all North Yorkshire County Councillors could see how the story was developing. Iain Crossley, Chair of the Clapham Action Group sets out how the headlines changed over the weeks on page 3.

The school Governing Body quickly realised the depth of support from the community. Three specific ideas enabled the Governors to see a viable future for the school: the work on future pupil numbers, a commitment to run before and after-school clubs to help working parents and the creation of the Clapham Educational Fund to ensure the school remains solvent.

The action group and Governors worked right up to the deadline and, on 4 April, Maria Farrer and Jill Gates delivered the submissions to County Hall.

The formal submissions would never have been enough, however, if the community hadn't got behind the response to the Council. Over two hundred comments were submitted online, this overwhelmed the Council officers and they had to ask for an extra two weeks to process them all and to prepare a report to the Council Executive. Underpinning the online submissions was the petition organised by Trace Bilton which gathered over two hundred signatures in support of the Governing Body recovery plan.

Once the various plans, submissions and petitions had gone to County Hall, the Governors and action group had a



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*Anxious wait for the decision at County Hall*

four week wait to hear the outcome. This was not a period of rest, however: the work went on to keep the story in the press and to influence the Councillors. Contingency plans were made for how the campaign might continue if County Hall gave the school the thumbs down.

Eventually the day dawned and on 30 April a small group set out in the early morning mist to Northallerton. Councillor David Ireton met the school and community representatives and shepherded them into the council chamber.

Short but heartfelt speeches were given by Iain Crossley for the community, Rob Willett on behalf of parents at the school and by Revd. John Davies who spoke for the Governing Body. The debate was then led by Councillor Patrick Mulligan who is responsible for education.

Several Councillors had their say and each praised the action group and Governors for their professional conduct and submissions, and all complimented the community for its loud and clear support for the school. After a few minutes a vote was taken and the school saved by a unanimous decision.



*Iain Crossley being interviewed by Look North*

The folks from Clapham remained quiet and restrained as they walked out of the meeting room before collapsing into relieved hugs and patting of backs.

The drive back to Clapham was quiet, one car got lost and went to Ripon, the other made it home by the direct route. In both cases the Governors and their community supporters were having the same thoughts. The school has been saved on the understanding that the recovery plan is put into action; the hard work starts now!

## A message from the Governors

There are many reasons for becoming a Governor of a school, but one of them is definitely NOT to see it closed. As a Governor there can be no worse scenario. Worse still to see it happening when the school is clearly on an upward trajectory, energised by a new acting headteacher and with a pupil roll that, over the past year, has started to rise rather than fall; a school full of happy children and dedicated staff; a school at the centre of the local community.

Thankfully, our community is the collective equivalent of a superhero. That so many people care enough to turn around the council's process of closure — an unprecedented result — and to support the school and the Governors by getting behind them in every possible way is a shining example of how rural areas like ours will continue to thrive.



*The NYCC Executive endorse the Governing Body Recovery Plan unanimously*

Our school can now look forward to the future with optimism. Key to this is encouraging more pupils to join us. The school may be small, but it provides a fantastic start to any child's education with the chance for every child to be an individual and every individual to excel.

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support.

## What's next?

The community is delighted that for the first time Councillors stopped a closure and kept Clapham Primary School open. This decision was made on the understanding that the Recovery Plan will now be actioned.

There will be lots of opportunities for everyone to support the school. The Recovery Plan anticipates an outward looking school in which local people play an important part. Please see the article by the Friends of Clapham School on the back page and let them know how you can help.

In the next issue of the newsletter, there will be a main article about the Clapham Educational Fund and other aspects of the recovery programme. This will explain how pledges to support the school can be made, including bank details, gift aid arrangements and how much has been raised to support the school in the next year.

The printing of this special edition of the newsletter was kindly supported by:

- St. James' church, Clapham,
- St. Matthew's church, Keasden, and the
- Methodist church, Newby.

## What the papers say

**BBC**

LOOK **NORTH**

**THE YORKSHIRE POST** *Craven Herald & Pioneer* *The Westmorland Gazette*



LANCASTER  
**GUARDIAN**

Press and media interest was subdued at first and the closure of Clapham School was presented as an inevitable done-deal; then gradually interest in the campaign started to grow with TV and radio interest and weekly, sometimes daily, coverage in the Yorkshire Post, Craven Herald, Westmorland Gazette and Lancaster Guardian.

The headlines gradually changed with the political mood as the story changed from a sad story about another small school closing to direct support for a well-argued cause which clearly meant a lot to our community in Clapham.

### The early headlines

“Closure fears for small primary”  
“School’s future on the line”  
“Please don’t close our school”  
“Desperate fight to keep schools open in the Dales”  
“Schools crisis: Rural communities need help”

### The campaign begins to bite

“Campaign on to save school at risk of closure”  
“Campaigners raise cash for school battle”  
“Villagers put hands in pockets for school”  
“Battle to save school stepped up”  
“Community prepared to dig deep”

### First glimmers of hope

“School decision put back”  
“Outcry delays ruling over school closure”

“Community steps up ... amid decision delay”

“MP holds talks with campaigner fighting school closure”

“Closure ‘not part of secret scheme to save money’”

“Council lifeline for campaigners fighting closure”

### The week before the decision

“Crunch meeting on 150-year-old school”

“Hopes raised to save school”

“Meeting will give full debate on school’s future”

### Decision day

“Primary school closure in Dales is halted”

### Success: Clapham Primary School to stay open after successful anti-closure campaign

*Front page headline from the Craven Herald, 2 May*

**BBC**

LOOK **NORTH**

**THE YORKSHIRE POST** *Craven Herald & Pioneer* *The Westmorland Gazette*



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## A community that responded in the hundreds

Over 200 written submissions were sent to North Yorkshire County Council in response to the proposed closure of Clapham Primary School. The issues we raised echo the deep-seated anxieties within rural communities at the loss of vital infrastructure, such as primary schools and GP surgeries.

The Community Action Group took a detailed look at the 200 written submissions sent to North Yorkshire County Council and identified our top four concerns:

- we feel a local primary school is critical to attract young families into rural communities such as ours;
- we thought the few remaining places in any primary schools which were left open after ours closed would be unable to cope with demand;
- we think a primary school is at the heart of any vibrant rural community;
- parents are happy with the quality of education their children receive and see a small primary school as helping their children develop.

Jill Gates who did the analysis said: ‘The analysis shows a school is the heart of a sustainable local community in the Yorkshire Dales; without a school the soul and vibrancy of the village is compromised and the strong sense of community between all ages undermined.

### A few of the many comments that swayed the Council

“Our children benefit from being in a small school setting, where each and every child looks out for each other as if they were family.”

“It takes a community like this to nurture and raise children in an environment which encourages them to develop to the best of their ability.”

“Clapham is not just a few houses in a pretty location. It is a thriving community with many active residents who care passionately about the future of the school and the village.”

“Closing the school would be a dagger in Clapham’s heart and could prove fatal in the long term if young people are deterred from moving here because we have no school.”

“I still live in the area and work just up the road in Clapham village, running a local business. The school was a fantastic platform for me.”

“Clapham is a close-knit and supportive community which I know will do its utmost to support the school in any way possible.”

“The children and parents bring a youthful air to the village. Is there anything better than hearing the happy voices of children?”



## Friends of Clapham School



*Cakes at the Friends Christmas Fair*

The Friends of Clapham School group is thrilled that the school is staying open and would like to thank absolutely everybody who worked on the recovery plan, signed the petition and contributed to the consultation. What a fantastic result!

Friends of Clapham School is a registered charity set-up by parents and members of the community to support the school with fundraising. Reinvigorated by the good news about the school staying open, there are lots of fun events planned in the next few months starting with a Table Top Trail around the village on 25 May.

In addition to fundraising for equipment, trips and other activities for the school children, the Friends of Clapham School group now also manages the Clapham Educational Fund.

The Fund has been established to enable the school to remain solvent during the recovery period. Anyone wishing to donate can contact Philip Farrer at Hall Garth or by sending an email to [info@friendsofclaphamschool.org.uk](mailto:info@friendsofclaphamschool.org.uk)

We would like as many members of the community as possible to join the Friends. If you made a submission to the Council on behalf of the school and would like to keep supporting us in the future, do think about joining.

Anyone who would like to join the Friends of Clapham School please get in touch with Zoe Richardson at [info@friendsofclaphamschool.org.uk](mailto:info@friendsofclaphamschool.org.uk) and please follow us on Facebook - see Friends of Clapham School and visit our website: [www.friendsofclaphamschool.org.uk](http://www.friendsofclaphamschool.org.uk)

*Zoe Richardson, Trustee, Friends of Clapham School*

## Clapham Village Table Top Trail Saturday 25 May, 10am-2pm



A fun community event for all the family, come and take a walk around the beautiful Clapham village and pick up a bargain at the craft, book and jumble stalls or try some delicious home-baking and refreshments!

*Follow the red balloons!*

If you would like to have a stall please contact Trace Bilton 07534 302135