

Thornton Parish Council:

Petition Opened

How a petition was opened to trigger a Community Governance Review in the previously un-Parished village of Thornton

Headlines:

- The village of Thornton is located in the city of Bradford, in the county of West Yorkshire.
- This case study outlines how the Thornton campaign group organised itself to start securing signatures on a petition for a new Thornton Parish Council from their residents for eventual submission to Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC).
- The campaign group in Thornton responded to feedback from the National and Yorkshire Associations of Local Councils in late 2015 and developed an excellent campaign plan which was aimed at leading to submission of the petition to BMDC soon afterwards.
- The story is told of how issues between the Thornton campaign group and the BMDC were overcome by building relationships, communicating regularly and using the advice from the Yorkshire and National Associations of Local Councils.
- Currently (March, 2016) the Thornton campaign group are finalising the numbers of signatures in their petition to ensure that the relevant threshold for submission is met pre-submission at Bradford Council.
- The lessons learnt so far from this campaign are that it is important to focus and have a clear and sustainable campaign plan from the start of the process of gathering petitionary signatures.

Clive Richardson, Vice Chair of the Thornton campaign group:

“Community Infrastructure Levy is topical as we’ve learnt Bradford Council holds over £140,000 in section 106 monies, for the ward, in part dating back to 2007. Thornton makes up 42% of the ward by population. Also Thornton is due to get 700 new houses in the next 13 years. We very much want a Parish Council for Thornton to drive some new income for resident based services for the area moving forward”.

What is the theme? - Why a Council is wanted:

The theme of this case study has been applied from a campaign pyramid used by the National Association of Local Councils and the Department for Communities and Local Government since September, 2013 when the New Councils’ Programme began - to gauge progress with funded campaigns to create new Parish Councils in previously un-Parished areas. Currently (January, 2016) Thornton’s campaign sits in the ‘yellow’ strata on the pyramid which represents campaign areas that have opened a petition to gather signatures from local government electors in the area they intend to Parish - in order to then trigger the relevant Community Governance Review. Depending on the population size of an area there are different thresholds of signatures required by a campaign group to obtain on a petition before such a petition can be submitted.

Residents in Thornton wanted a new Parish Council to give the areas a stronger voice for their small village and also to deliver new funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy which would benefit services residents wanted. They no longer wanted to be instructed by Bradford Metropolitan District Council in their dealings as a village. Parish councils are statutory, and almost always permanent, democratically elected bodies – so this added to the existing attraction of the model to Thornton’s residents.

“A Thornton Parish Council will give residents many advantages they do not currently enjoy. One of our campaign newsletters concentrated on recreation, open spaces, litter, cleansing, sport, and the environment in line with potential running down of these services by Bradford Council in its 2016-17 budgets.”

– Clive Richardson
Vice Chairman, Thornton Campaign Group

Contextual issues related to the theme:

Once a campaign group has gathered the relevant number of signatures on its campaign petition it submits the petition to the Electoral Services Department of its principal local authority; in Thornton’s case, this would be the BMDC. The petition is then vetted and if the relevant number of acceptable signatures have been obtained, the green light is given for the principal local authority to trigger the CGR. Such reviews now need by law to conclude within 12 months of the petition having been accepted for consideration. Recently, the green light was given by Bradford Council to the creation of a new Parish Council in Bingley.

Thornton is a village on the outskirts of Bradford which is best known as being the birthplace of the Brontës. Situated on the route of the Brontë Way long distance footpath, Thornton is within easy reach of Bradford city centre and Haworth as well as other sites of particular interest to Brontë enthusiasts. At about the time of the Domesday Book, Thornton – then a very small hamlet to the west of Bradford – was registered with the name "Torenton" under the manor of Bolton, but was soon after acquired by a family of "considerable consequence" who took their name from the place. The last surviving member of this family, Roger de Thornton, died without an heir and "levied a fine" with the manor passing into the hands of the Bollings of Bolling Hall and others later.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw un-precedent growth in West Yorkshire, with the population of Bradford increasing fourfold. The subsequent rise in the population of Thornton led to the building of a new church. This replaced the old Bell Chapel (where Patrick Brontë served during the family's stay in the village). Despite its relatively isolated location, Thornton saw a considerable rise in its fortunes due principally to the industrial revolution and an increased demand for sandstone hewn from local quarries.

Soon after this, Thornton was connected to the Great Northern Railway by a line which ran from Bradford through Clayton to Denholme, and although the line was later dismantled, an impressive arched viaduct still remains which spans the valley of the Bradford beck just below the village, and which now forms part of the Great Northern Railway Trail.

Who are the key partners/ stakeholders involved?

The main campaign group to create a new Parish Council in Thornton has been the Thornton Community Council Group (TCCG). Without the likes of residents Christine Rowland and Clive Richardson, there simply would have been no campaign since 2014-15. The Yorkshire Local Councils Associations accessed DCLG funding during 2015-16 from the National Association of Local Councils which helped to progress campaign activity with the production of newsletters and the holding of public meetings, etc.

The National Association of Local Councils campaign funded the Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations and the Thornton Community Council Group and it is fair to say that this funding was instrumental in both sustaining the gathering of signatures and helping to communicate the benefits of a Parish Council to Thornton residents. DCLG assisted by providing the funding in the first place to NALC to distribute amongst both YLCA and TCCG.

What are the key issues/ challenges? - Progress with the campaign to date:

The Thornton Community Council Group has done an excellent job in driving the campaign to create a new Parish Council in Thornton. It is the body which gathers the petitionary signatures and it will be the body in 2016 which submits the final petition to Bradford Metropolitan District Council. The Yorkshire Associations of Local Councils (in particular Chris Pilkington) were seminal in advising TCCG during every stage of the campaign. The YLCA and the NALC both advised on technical issues around the gathering of petitionary signatures and codifying a campaign plan.

“When Thornton Community Council Group wanted to apply for more grant monies from NALC later in 2015, both Associations felt there was a need for real focus and a campaign plan for the duration of the petitionary phase of the campaign and beyond. The group received a vital grant of £1000 which has achieved just that.”

– Chris Pilkington, Yorkshire Associations of Local Councils

How have the issues/ challenges been overcome?

Thornton Community Campaign Group focussed a campaign plan in November, 2016 in its final funding bid to the NALC for £1,000 of grant funding. Three newsletters were funded and the holding of two more public meetings for TCCG to hold with residents. The monies as a result of the plan were awarded and the meetings and newsletters have helped greatly to promote the benefits of creating a new Parish Council in Thornton as well as to re-cast to residents what services could be sustained in the area as Bradford Council started an ongoing programme of cuts.

Outcomes – Learning from the campaign:

The Thornton campaign group have been using the £1,000 they were awarded by the NALC in November 2016 to produce three newsletters based on:

- The CIL income which a Parish Council with a Neighbourhood Plan could yield in Thornton;
- Recreation, open spaces, litter, cleansing, sport, and the environment in line with potential running down of these services by Bradford Council in its 2016-17 budgets; &
- More widely, on the benefits of creating a community council in Thornton.

Learning from the campaign will also have been shared with Thornton residents during two public meetings to March, 2016 and with YLCA, NALC and DCLG through the submission of quarterly campaign reports.



The village of Thornton, West Yorkshire.

What have been the key elements of success?

The Thornton Community Council Group and YLCA have both been successful in keeping the campaign for a new Parish Council in Thornton going during 2015 when there was at one point a slight malaise in sustaining resident interest. The key test will now be whether TCCG can get over the finish line with the number of signatures needed and trigger the CGR required.

What has been learnt? Campaign lessons to share with others:

Campaigners recognise that regular communication with the Thornton residents through as many media platforms as possible is vital to the success of a campaign. Where there are access problems, such as loose dogs, flats without letter boxes, etc. TCCG have still undertaken to post the newsletters. In addition newsletters to isolated dwellings and most

farms will be posted. This real commitment to promoting lessons learnt will probably be what finally secures the creation of this new Parish Council.

Who Can I Contact?

Campaign Champion: Christine Rowland 01274 833990 / 07941 030331 / Cmrow13@gmail.com

Chris Pilkington of YLCA: 01904 436622/ Chris.Pilkington@yorkshirelca.gov.uk

Other information:

*More information on creating a Council: The NALC 'Create a Council' web page:
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .*

*The NALC 'Power to the People' resource:
<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/publications> .*

*Thornton Community Council Group:
<http://www.thorntonccc.org.uk/>*

*Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations:
http://www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk/YLCA-Web/Welcome_3247.aspx .*