



**Thornton Community Council: Petitioning For A New Parish Council in
Thornton, Yorkshire**



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 responded to feedback from the National and Yorkshire Associations of Local Councils in late 2015 and developed a strong campaign plan which was aimed at leading to submission of a campaign petition for a new Thornton Community Council to Bradford Metropolitan District Council (BMDC).
- The story is told of how issues between the Thornton campaign group and BMDC were overcome by building relationships, communicating regularly and following campaign advice from the Yorkshire and National Associations of Local Councils.
- Currently the Thornton campaign group is finalising the numbers of signatures on its petition to ensure that the relevant threshold for submission is met pre-submission at Bradford Council (which is not accepting an e-petition from the campaign group).
- 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, working around the needs of a principal local authority where an e-petition will not be accepted.

Why a Council is Wanted:

The campaign for a Thornton Community Council was funded by the National Association of Local Councils and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in 2014-15 as part of their New Councils' Programme. Currently Thornton's campaign has opened a petition to gather signatures from local government electors in its prospective parish council area - in order to then trigger the relevant Community Governance Review (the process through which a parish council is created). 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. The electorate of Thornton is about 13,700 so the campaign group will need to secure at least 1000 signatures on its hard copy petition.

Residents in Thornton wanted a new community council to give its area a stronger voice for and also to deliver new funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy which would enhance services residents wanted (the Community Infrastructure Levy [CIL] is a fee agreed between a developer, a community and a planning authority with a CIL scheme – which the developer agrees to pay when it undertakes a large development – to benefit the community the development is taking place in).



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”.

Thornton residents wanted to work with Bradford Council in their dealings as a village – but to derive their own public income to spend on projects important to Thornton residents – based on strategic decisions made on behalf of only Thornton residents – by an accountable body elected to do this. This was within the gift of a Thornton Community Council. 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.

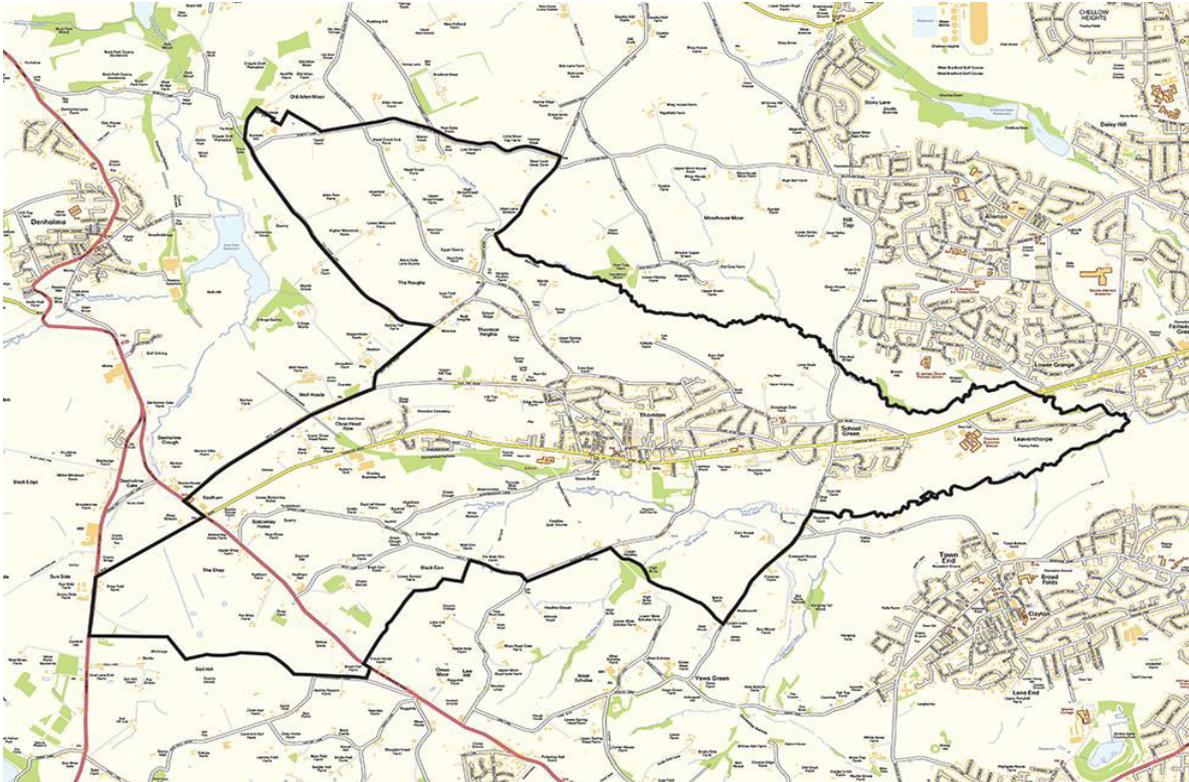
At three public meetings in 2015 it became clear that residents were broadly supportive of creating a Thornton Community Council. They were attracted to the idea of the Community Council’s powers to create a Neighbourhood Plan, support local groups through grants and publicity, develop tourism and regeneration strategies – and deliver them, create health and well-being initiatives, run public assets, organise community transport schemes, fund Christmas lights, take on and manage markets, and establish a community energy scheme, and set up and manage an up to date village website detailing activities and issues in the community.

Generating Campaign Support:

Once the Thornton campaign group has gathered the 1000+ signatures on its campaign petition it will submit the petition to Bradford Council. The petition will then be vetted and if the relevant number of acceptable signatures have been obtained, the green light will be given for a Community Governance Review (the process through which Bradford Council will decide whether to create Thornton Community Council or not). Recently, permission was given by Bradford Council for the creation of a new parish council in Bingley.

The campaign group in Thornton has always focussed on using every opportunity available to secure more signatures on its hard copy petition. It created a web-site (details at the end of this document) to publicise 3 public meetings in 2015 where residents could hear the benefits of a Thornton Community Council and then sign the petition. It used the web-site

to clearly promote the benefits of creating a Thornton Community Council, the powers and duties of parish councils, how much a Thornton Community Council might cost residents and the intended geographical boundary of any new Thornton Community Council.



Above – map of the proposed Thornton Community Council boundary.

The campaign group also drew up a detailed campaign plan in mid-2015 which it implemented and will continue to implement to the end of the first campaign phase, when the hard copy petition is submitted. Leaflets were also distributed in June 2015 to all Thornton residents promoting three public meetings which took place later that year – in an effort to ensure enough foot-fall to sign the campaign petition at those events. So all campaign activity has centred around the web-site and leaflets driving residents to public meetings where the hard copy petition can be signed - and so far this has been effective.

Who Are The Key Partners Involved?:

The main campaign group to create a new parish council in Thornton has been the Thornton Community Council Group. Without the Thornton Community Council Group there would simply have been no campaign to create a new parish council in the village since 2014-15. The Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations accessed Department of Communities and Local Government 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.



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.

What Are The Key Issues / Challenges?:

The Thornton Community Council Group has effectively sustained the campaign to create a new community council in Thornton, as there have been some challenges to the campaign so far. It is the body which gathers the petitionary signatures and it will be the body which submits the final petition to Bradford Council. The Yorkshire Local Councils' Associations (YLCA) were seminal in advising the campaign group during every stage of the campaign. YLCA and the National Association of Local Councils both advised on technical issues around the gathering of petitionary signatures and codifying a campaign plan. This advice was listened to by the campaign group which is now implementing its blended approach of leafleting, holding public meetings and sustaining campaign momentum from its web-site (<http://www.thorntonccc.org.uk/>). Earlier in 2015 it had been clear that the campaign was losing momentum as there was no coherent campaign plan in place, despite effective campaign materials produced.

“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 Local Councils' Associations

How Have The Issues / Challenges Been Overcome?:

Thornton Community Campaign Group produced a focussed campaign plan in November, 2015 in its final funding bid to NALC for £1,000 of grant funding. Three newsletters were funded and the holding of two more public meetings for the campaign group 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 starts an ongoing programme of cuts.

The leaflets produced by the campaign group promoted the benefits of creating a Thornton Community Council and sign-posted residents to the relevant public meetings to sign the petition. The meetings were a very effective way of explaining to residents the powers and duties of parish councils and to elicit suggestions about the types of service and asset residents might want from Thornton Community Council (please see

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> for templates of the type of leaflet the Thornton campaign group were adapting for this purpose).



Above: a leaflet promoting one of the public meetings in Thornton.

Of the 3 newsletters the first concentrated on some planning aspects of local councils – the need to be consulted, the Community Infrastructure Levy, and Neighbourhood Development Plans. The Community Infrastructure Levy proved topical at the public meetings as the campaign group learnt Bradford Council holds over £140,000 in section 106 monies for the Thornton ward, in part dating back to 2007. Thornton makes up 42% of the ward by population. Also Thornton is due to have 700 new houses built in the next 13 years, so there is a real opportunity to derive more community benefit from such monies for Thornton residents.

The second newsletter concentrated on recreation, open spaces, litter, cleansing, sport and the environment in line with potential running down of these services by Bradford Council in future budgets.

The third leaflet contained a summary of the benefits of creating new local councils. Accompanying was a letter stating that the campaign group would be calling at residents' homes on specified dates and times, such as morning or afternoon to ask residents to sign the campaign petition.

Outcomes – Learning From The Campaign:

The Thornton campaign group have been using the £1,000 they were awarded by NALC in November 2015 to produce three newsletters based on:

- The Community Infrastructure Levy 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 future budgets; &
- More widely, on the benefits of creating a community council in Thornton.

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



Above; The village of Thornton, West Yorkshire.

Campaign Strengths So Far:

The Thornton Community Council Group and YLCA have both been successful in sustaining the campaign for a new parish council in Thornton during 2015 when there was at one point a slight malaise in resident interest. The key test will now be whether the campaign group can submit the petition with the relevant number of signatures needed and trigger the Community Governance Review required.

Campaign Lessons to Share With Others:

Campaigners recognise that regular communication with Thornton residents through as any media platforms as possible is vital to the success of a campaign. Where there are access problems, such as loose dogs or flats without letter boxes - the Thornton campaign group has still undertaken to post the newsletters. In addition newsletters to isolated dwellings and most farms have been posted (Thornton is a semi-rural area).



Monitoring the endgame of submitting the hard copy petition has been and remains the top priority of the Thornton campaign group. Many campaigners work full time and due to the early lack of a coherent campaign plan the requisite number of signatures have not yet been obtained. However, the campaign group is still determined to complete a valid petition – especially since Bradford Council refused an e-petition – which now means that the hard copy petition is the only route for residents to pursue. This approach and continuous promotion of the benefits of a Thornton Community Council to residents will hopefully yield this campaign the positive results the campaign group deserves.

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> .

To see template resources such as a media release, leaflet and poster, please click here:

<http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council> .

To see case studies from other areas campaigning to set up new parish councils please click here <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 .