8 South Green

Byrness

Northumberland NE19 1TT

5th June 2018

Submission of Objection to the Proposed Closure of Bellingham Middle School

As a parent of two children who attend Bellingham Middle School I would like to make clear my objections to the recommendation to close the school and my deep concern for the welfare of my children should they have to travel to Haydon Bridge on a daily basis.

We live in Byrness, and my children already travel on the school bus for 45 minutes every morning to get to school, and a further 45 minutes every evening to return home. This 'commute time' is not without consequence, and impacts on their time at home each day, and their ability and motivation to join other children in clubs and activities. However, we live in a rural area and understand that some travelling is needed to attend Middle School and we are delighted with their level of attainment at school.

If Bellingham Middle School closes, they will have to travel each day to Haydon Bridge. This would be a 45 minute extension to their current 45 minute journey, so is likely to take in excess of an hour and a half each way on the school bus. This would mean my two children and many of their peers would be commuting 3 hours every day, which is an unreasonable expectation for 11 and 12 year olds, and can only be detrimental to their wellbeing. I note the Department for Education's School Travel and Transport guidance suggests that students of secondary age (11 upwards), should travel no more than 75 minutes each way to and from school. My childrens travel time would exceed this by almost 25%. In years 11 and 12, my children would be spending 585 hours on a bus, which is over 24 full days, needlessly sitting on a bus. It is clear that the proposal cannot have the best interests of pupils and families at its heart.

I understand the aim to improve educational standards and attainment within the catchment area, but how will tired children, who spend three hours each day on a bus, be expected to perform well at school or in life generally? They will still be expected to complete homework, so the time they spend each day travelling and studying will be 11 hours. They will spend some two hours at home getting up, having meals and getting ready for bed. The recommended amount of sleep for this age range is 9 hours. This totals 22 hours every day, which leaves children just two hours a day to play, socialise, have fun and have a fulfilling childhood. Two hours 'down time' is woefully inadequate. Rather than driving up education attainment and standards, the affect will be that they fall.

I note that following consultation, there was a recommendation to reject a similar proposal within the Hexham catchment area because "(3.9)…the proposition of HLT would cause too much disruption to the system to schools and families in the Hexham area". If this reason is valid in Hexham, it is clearly valid within the Haydon Bridge area. The level of disruption for us is the same and significant.

The reason given within the report for the need of a Secondary School is that it will "(3.11) preserve choice for parents and children". For us, it limits choice and ties my children to an unacceptably long daily commute.

The 'Guidance for decision makers' published by the Department for Education in April 2016 (p.4) for those deciding upon prescribed alteration and establishment and discontinuation formal proposals states; ' The decision-maker must consider the views of those affected by a proposal or who have an interest in it including cross-LA border interests. The decision-maker should not simply take account of the number of people expressing a particular view. ***Instead, they should give greatest weight to the responses from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by a proposal – especially parents of children at the affected school(s).***'

I note that the report to cabinet of 9th May stated that it was "(3.4)…not possible to gain consensus during the two phases of informal consultation." However, in response to the proposals which suggested closing Bellingham Middle School, over 70% of respondents were against it.

The view of parents and pupils at Bellingham Middle School is that its proposed closure is a disaster for the children, their families and the wider communities living in North Tynedale and Redesdale. Closing the middle schools would

have a significant impact on the sustainability our remote community as families choose to move away to places where they would have local educational provision which would no longer be available for 11 and 12 years olds here.

Access to after school activities would be limited as I would have to drive to Haydon Bridge to collect my children if they were to stay after the bus leaves. This is a significant cost and would increase traffic and pollution.

The consensus is that the three-tier system of education is the only model which takes into account the rurality and remoteness of these areas and mitigates the impacts of long journeys to school for as long as possible.

Keeping Bellingham Middle School open would mean that time which would otherwise be spent travelling to Haydon Bridge could be much better used. Children would be less tired, so more motivated and better able to complete homework. They will be able to continue to take part in after school clubs and activities and develop their social skills and participate in community activities. They would have time to have a fulfilling childhood, to have hobbies and spend quality time with their friends and families. Keeping Bellingham Middle School open would demonstrate a full understanding of these vitally important issues, issues which will have a direct impact on the quality young children's lives.

In conclusion, I know that maintaining Bellingham Middle School and the three-tier system in this most rural and remote part of Northumberland is the only proposal which truly puts the needs and wellbeing of the child first.

Thank you for taking the time to read my objection, and I hope for your understanding and consideration of the real needs of the children at Bellingham Middle School.

Yours faithfully,

Kim Bull.