

West Ashton Parish Council

Please reply to the Clerk – Mrs C Hackett, 23 Orchard Close, West Ashton,
Wiltshire BA14 6AU. Tel: 01225 760372 email: carol-hackett@hotmail.com



Mr John Watling
Deputy Returning Officer and Head of Electoral Services
Wiltshire Council
Bythesea Road
Trowbridge
Wiltshire
BA14 8JN

2nd October 2014

Dear Mr Watling,

Re: Wiltshire Governance Review

I am writing on behalf of West Ashton Parish Council, regarding the Governance Review currently being carried out by Wiltshire Council, and in particular the boundary changes that have been proposed by Trowbridge Town Council as part of that Review.

Councillors considered the proposals submitted by Trowbridge Town Council at a recent Parish Council meeting and resolved to strongly oppose the proposals for the following reasons -

- The premise of Trowbridge Town Council's argument is that the effect on the electorate numbers is minimal, changes follow natural boundaries, and in the case of 'Old Farm', it is because of its proximity to Trowbridge. However they have had a total disregard for the severe negative financial impact that their proposals to subsume key outlying development sites will have on neighbouring Parish Council's - there is no balance of benefit whatsoever for the Parishes.
- The Parish of West Ashton borders the County Town of Trowbridge on one side, with the River Biss forming the natural historic boundary. There are currently approximately 313 properties in the Parish, 136 of which make up the 'Old Farm' Housing Estate, on the West Ashton Road (area 4a). The precept for West Ashton, plus top-up grant from Wiltshire Council for 2014/15 totalled £4,230 (£13.46 per Band D equivalent property). The Governance Report - June 2014 shows that Trowbridge Town Council are proposing to extend their boundary to include this estate, which would effectively reduce the precept for West Ashton by almost a half, barely leaving sufficient income to fund employment of a part-time Clerk.
- Trowbridge Town Council have indicated that, mainly due to the effects of the proposal for 'Old Farm', the electorate of the current 'Southwick' division will be reduced by approximately -13.8% to 3184 - resulting in it being the smallest division in the Trowbridge Area, well below the average for all the Electoral Divisions in Wiltshire of 3,695 electors - this can surely not be regarded as a 'minimal' change?
- Trowbridge Town Council are also proposing to extend their boundary even further to encompass the 'Ashton Park Urban Extension' (area 4c). A large planned development of 2,600 properties, including employment land, 2 local service centres, a possible 3 schools and other associated facilities planned predominately within the Parish of West Ashton, with a portion of the development coming within the

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boundary of our neighbouring Parish, North Bradley. West Ashton Parish Council consider that this proposed boundary change is premature - the proposed 2600 houses in 'Ashton Park' are likely to generate twice that number of voters and could inevitably result in the establishment of at least one new Electoral Division in its own right. In addition to the loss of potential precept income to West Ashton Parish Council as a result of this proposal, there will also be the loss of the considerable amount of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) revenue that will be generated from the development.

- In addition Trowbridge Town Council are also proposing to annex the employment land identified as “West Ashton Road Employment Land” (area 4b), there is no impact on the electorate at this time. The land has not been developed despite having planning approval since 1999, however there are now plans in a late stage to develop the area for recreational use with a sports centre and nursery amongst the proposed facilities. This area would form an integral part of the 'Ashton Park' development, and therefore it would seem perfectly reasonable for it to remain within the West Ashton Parish boundary.
- In 2013/14 changes in Government funding to Local Authorities, meant that the way the precept was being administered changed. Although an additional top up grant was provided by Wiltshire Council in 2013/14 to make up the shortfall, this level of support could not be sustained in 2014/15. As yet there has been no indication as to what/if any additional support will be offered by Wiltshire Council for 2015/16. The impact of these changes initiated by Central Government are already squeezing Parish budgets to the bare minimum, and any potential reduction in the size of the Parish population caused by any proposed boundary changes will inevitably severely affect the viability of West Ashton Parish Council.
- The Parish Council would urge Wiltshire Council during the review process to seriously consider the financial impact that these proposed boundary changes will have on West Ashton - The Parish Council **could not** function effectively as a result of these proposals. It is also essential that the wishes of the local inhabitants are taken into account, and the negative effect that such changes could have on rural and village life are seriously considered. The needs of a rural community are very different to those of a larger town, and since the introduction of the Localism Act in 2010, West Ashton Parish Council have welcomed the opportunity to take on more responsibilities and become more involved in dealing with the day to day issues affecting our community, actively working alongside the local Authority to get the best for all concerned. We strongly believe that the ideals of the Localism Act would not support the changes proposed by Trowbridge Town Council to hive off lucrative areas of development from local Parishes, to subsidise their own finances, to the detriment of the Parish Councils.

We would be very grateful if you will please give these comments your due consideration with a view to allowing West Ashton Parish Council to remain, at least as it is now, with no change to its existing boundaries.

Yours sincerely

Carol Hackett

Mrs Carol Hackett
West Ashton Parish Clerk

cc Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London
Andrew Murrison MP, Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London