

John,

In your email of 27 June 2014 you requested that Melksham Town Council's proposals as part of a prospective Community Governance Review be forwarded to you such that the Working Party can assess the extent and implications associated with those proposals. Accordingly, I detail below some observations for consideration as part of this process:

1. Melksham Town Council believes that the parish boundary between Melksham Town and Melksham Without Parish Council has become anomalous in the light of recent housing development particularly on land to the east of the town.
2. Furthermore, proposed residential development proposals have been submitted in respect of land south of Western Way, Bowerhill, Melksham; land east of Semington Road, Berryfield, Melksham and land east of Spa Road, Melksham. Should these proposals come to fruition the urban conurbation of Melksham will continue to spread eastwards whilst the urban footprint to the south of the town will expand and effectively link with Berryfield and Bowerhill.
3. The emerging core strategy dictates that some 800 new homes will need to be identified within the Melksham community area by 2026. Whilst the location of residential development has yet to be determined and is intended to be the subject of neighbourhood planning analysis, it is apparent that Melksham's expansion will continue and that community governance in turn will need to be effective and convenient, reflecting the identity and interests of the expanded community.
4. The Town Council notes that the Guidance on Community Governance Reviews ("the Guidance") issued in 2010 recognises that over time communities may expand with new housing developments which can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours.
5. The Town Council notes also that it is suggested within the Guidance (para. 26) that it is good practice for a principal council to consider conducting a review every 10-15 years. In essence therefore any review conducted now should be cognisant of the need to ensure that the integrity of boundaries deemed necessary are sufficiently robust to remain appropriate during that time frame.
6. Melksham Town Council believes that a unified council with a common agenda will serve to provide a positive benefit for the wider Melksham community. It is not suggested that either Melksham Town Council should absorb Melksham Without Parish Council or vice versa. Rather, it is proposed that the two parishes should be dissolved in their current form and a new common parish created. The parameters of the new parish will effectively be those currently defining the outer boundary of Melksham Without Parish Council.
7. It is recognised that Shaw and Whitley may feel subsumed by such a proposal and, if that is perceived to be the case, and subject to appropriate consultation, it may be deemed appropriate that Shaw and Whitley be grouped under a newly defined parish council with Atworth for example.

8. Melksham Town Council understands that Wiltshire Council's stated vision is to create stronger and more resilient communities. The Town Council is of the view that greater responsibility will be devolved to town and parish councils over time to provide additional services, which will have the effect of placing yet greater demands on the ability of third tier councils to cope effectively. One unified council for Melksham may be better placed to work in the best interests of residents in the wider Melksham community thereby improving its capacity to deliver better services and being better placed to represent the community's interests. A united council, working toward a cohesive strategic plan, will allow synergies to be exploited and efficiencies generated.
9. The Town Council believes that Melksham Town and Melksham Without are interdependent on each other for social and economic cohesion. The rural communities all look towards Melksham town as the nearest shopping centre and focal hub in terms of retail, commerce, some sporting activities, transport interchange, library, banks, medical and other services, including the exciting community campus proposition. Melksham Without on the other hand, with Bowerhill 's vibrant industrial estate and secondary school, the parish sports facilities, open space and rural environment is essential to the residents of Melksham town for the provision of education, employment and recreation.
10. It is recognised that future residential growth should contribute towards delivering improved infrastructure and in particular growth should contribute towards town centre regeneration, including traffic management improvements. This clearly impacts upon all residents who identify with and frequent the town which sits at the heart of the wider community it serves.
11. The proposed Melksham link to join the Wilts and Berks Canal to the Kennet and Avon Canal via the River Avon through Melksham has major implications for both parishes. In Melksham Without, the Canal will traverse the village of Berryfield, providing extensive environmental benefits in terms of sustainable transport, cycling and walking. For Melksham, the canal link via the River Avon will increase tourism and provide the market place for a thriving recreation economy. A united council would ensure that this unique opportunity is tapped to its full potential.
12. The emerging Core Strategy's future vision for Melksham is described as a thriving and accessible town with a respect for its heritage and rural environment and a strengthened employment base. This chimes with a desire to create a cohesive, attractive and economically vibrant community with its own sense of place and local identity which, Melksham Town Council believes, will be best achieved through a united council which will be empowered to provide stronger local leadership, promote community cohesion, and encourage greater resident participation.
13. The Guidance states that *"the general rule should be that the parish is based on an area which reflects community identity and interest"* (para. 80) and makes reference to the ability to amalgamate two or more parishes (para. 87). Moreover the Guide suggests that in deciding what recommendations to make as part of a review *"the principal council must have regard to the need to secure that community governance reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area and is effective and convenient"* (para. 94).

14. The Guidance acknowledges it may be preferable to group together parishes so as to allow a common parish council to be formed though this must be compatible with the retention of community interests (para. 114). Furthermore the Guidance expressly refers to a scenario where the principal council *“may conclude that the provision of effective and convenient local government and/or the reflection of community identity and interests may be best met by the abolition of a number of smaller parishes and the creation of a larger parish covering the same area”* (para. 117).
15. Melksham Town Council recognises that the prospect of one council for Melksham may be perceived as a radical departure from the established structure of local government within the locality. However given the challenges ahead, allied to the desire to do the best thing for the people of Melksham, the Town Council respectfully requests that Wiltshire Council explores the viability of creating a united Melksham Parish Council, with a common agenda, as part of any forthcoming Community Governance Review.

I hope this is helpful in explaining the Town Council’s current stance but please do not hesitate to contact me again should you and or the Working Party require anything further at this stage.

Best regards,

Steve

Steve Gray
Town Clerk
Melksham Town Council
Town Hall
Melksham
Wiltshire
SN12 6ES

T: (01225) 704187

F: (01225) 707858

E: stephen.gray@melkshamtown.co.uk

Disclaimer and Confidentiality Notice

This email and any attachment are confidential to the intended recipients and access to this email by anyone else is unauthorised. If you should not have received this email, please notify us immediately by reply email and then destroy any copies and delete this message from your system. Unless authorised by Melksham Town Council, copying, forwarding, disclosing or using this email or its contents is prohibited. Melksham Town Council is not responsible for controlling transmissions over the internet and makes no representation or warranty as to the absence of viruses in this email or any attachment.