

These Views are expressed by Melksham Seniors Executive Committee and Brian Warwick, Chair Melksham Community Seniors 55+ Forum, to the Wiltshire Council on Community Governance Review – October 2015

Comments are made on the basis of the "Guidance on community governance reviews" by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England of which "Principal Authorities are required, by section 100 (4) of The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to have regard to this guidance which is issued by the Secretary of State, under section 100 (1) and (3), and the LGBCE under section 100 (2).

3. From 13 February 2008 Unitary County councils Have had responsibility for undertaking community governance reviews and have been able to decide whether to give effect to recommendations made in those reviews. In making that decision, they will need to take account of the views of local people.

Our views also take into account the submission of the Melksham Without Parish Council, which we fail to agree with, as it unlikely to provide the appropriate development of the desirable infrastructure to meet the needs of an expanding Melksham Community.

We are pleased that the County Council is carrying out wide consultation and seeking the views of residents and local organisations in Melksham as well as holding public meetings. Our local independent Newspaper in Melksham is also giving the public the opportunity to express their views and at the same time increasing the awareness of the importance of the review in the public domain at a low cost to the County purse.

We are also pleased that Melksham Town Council have also provided the public and local organisations with the opportunity to input their views during the period of their deliberations. It was the very wise views expressed by individuals and organisations on the economic opportunities and social benefits that we found to be of great value in helping members of our Forum to formulate our responses.

Melksham Town is a major retailing area with five six national supermarkets and a major department store, it also support a wide range of renowned restaurants, The three local surgeries are in close walking Town centre, as are the chemists and retailing establishments, even Melksham Without Parish Council recognise the importance of having their offices in the Town Centre because of the ideal geographical location in respect of the their dispersed communities. Having one Council would in our view create a closer social structure, particularly bearing in mind the majority of amenities are in the Town Centre and also the development and location of the campus in the centre of the Town, which will be serving all of Melksham.

There is also a desirable need to consider the wider issues around the Health and wellbeing of the the hard to reach members of our wider communities and the older people and disabled who are well served by the facilities within the Town compared with outlying communities, having one council would provide an opportunity to adopt a more strategic and economical opportunity to improve those services and links with the voluntary sector. Much has been made by Melksham Without in respect of their lower precept that of course is not a matter or consideration in this review, That fact however, that the Parish have referred to it, highlights the unfairness where close neighbours are actually subsidising many of the local amenities and facilities that all the local Melksham communities benefit from, though unfortunately they also fail to provide an equitable contribution to the local voluntary sector compared with support of the Town Council.

Yet, Melksham voluntary groups do not identify their level of support on Melksham Town or Melksham Without boundaries but on need and of serving the residents of Melksham without any discrimination as to parish or community boundaries. In fact, many of our own services and projects around social isolation are based on the needs of Melksham Without parish communities.

Melksham Seniors support services are provided on need, rather than based upon the Melksham Without support of reasonable equity per head in funding. This is making it extremely hard for the voluntary sector to provide the desirable levels of equitable services under the present boundary structures with the parish, with so few facilities and such low financial support for tackling loneliness and social isolation for they're ageing population.

The 2007 Act places a duty on principal authorities to have regard to the need to secure that any community governance for the area under review should reflect the identities and interests of the local community in that area, in the case of ONE council that would be the wider community as previously recognised in respect of Chippenham.

Whilst it is recognised that there is a distinct identities of the surrounding villages of Shaw, Whitley, Beanacre, Berryfield and Bowerhill. They are all in fact individual communities with very little if any cohesion in its geographical structure other than historical for forming rural now outdated ring around Melksham Town which in 2015 provides their main retailing and allied services, alongside the majority of social infrastructure other than small village halls and school buildings and in the case of Bowerhill a soon to be defunct leisure centre.

A cohesive community is one where there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities. We believe that a one Melksham council would best serve those needs. That the villages and all the local communities would still be able to readily maintain their local identities and these could be further enhanced by naming each new electoral ward by their chosen community name. The local Village Halls would also continue to be known as their chosen name as would local voluntary groups, exactly in the same way as similar long established local communities in Melksham Town, such as Forest and Queensway which have retained that close community identity without any problems. Forest of course going back more than 100" years. We are also mindful of the County devolution plan to ensure the town councils and community groups are cost effective and sharpens the focus of public services, brings in additional resources and achieves better outcomes. With local grant funding currently leveraging in £6 of community resources for every £1 awarded, one council would be better able to achieve that goal.

Principal councils have a duty to consider the wider picture of community governance in carrying out their reviews. In some areas there may be well established forms of community governance such as local residents' associations, or community forums which local people have set up and make a distinct contribution to the community, there is no reason what so ever that could not be further developed and even enhanced.

Throughout England local communities have retained and in some cases improved those links as a result of mergers. We also believe that the quality of life in our community can be enhanced for older people by a more cohesive community wide strategy in which the supply, design and location of homes are appropriate for the opportunities and challenges of later life; and in which decisions around the built environment and transport, cultural and leisure services create places in which growing old is a pleasure rather than a continuous battle because of a lack of strategic support. Melksham Seniors Forum is an excellent example of developing a strong Melksham cohesive community group without the constrains of the parish boundaries. The senior forum would not however be able to provide the regular ageing better active ageing activities and films shows, along with projects tackling loneliness and social isolation without the community infrastructure the Town provide and the £1,500 grant we received from Melksham Town, that is compared with the Melksham Without grant of £100, which does not even cover the community transport cost which is incurred for three activity events for older people living in the parish area's of Melksham.

The use of the Melksham Assembly Hall and the Town Hall for seniors projects and activities alongside the uses by many other community groups, clearly demonstrates that Older People in the Parish of Melksham Without, would not adequately have their social and active ageing support needs fully met without the use of the facilities provided by the Town and the welcome support of the Town precept.

We are of the view that there is an extremely strong case for ONE council in Melksham to provide the right economical, commercial and health and well-being support which will assist in enhancing our community social structure for different generations, which will be needed even more as the Population of the Town grows. We believe there is a need to ensure that the right infrastructures will be able to be put in place to serve those needs by having one council, which would be more appropriately equipped to plan and cater for the needs of future generations. The present council structures would unlikely be able to provide the right level of dynamism to create the right cohesive community structure that meets the needs of an expanding and hopefully vibrant expanding community.

Brian Warwick & Melksham Community Seniors 55 + Forum.