

WORKING GROUP ON PARISH & COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON PARISH & COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2015 AT MELKSHAM OAK COMMUNITY SCHOOL.

Present:

Cllr Jon Hubbard and Cllr Stuart Wheeler

Also Present:

Ian Gibbons, John Watling and Will Oulton

1 **Welcome & Introductions**

The Chairman welcomed those present and introduced the panel. It was noted that Cllr Ian McLennan and Cllr Ernie Clarke had been unable to attend this meeting.

2 **Purpose and procedures of the meeting**

The Chairman explained the reasons for Community Governance Reviews, procedure for the meeting, and that decisions on boundaries would be taken by Full Council. In making his presentation, the Chairman highlighted the following issues:

- That the Council was obliged to review boundaries where requests had been received.
- That all political groups were represented on the Working Group which would formulate proposals to be put to the meeting of the Full Council.
- The statutory guidance that had be given, and the key considerations that should be referred to in the deliberations;
- The Chair drew the meeting's attention the FAQs in the agenda papers;
- That the purpose of the meeting is to explain the proposals and to seek views;

That the Working Group intended to present recommendations to the November meeting of Council;

The Chairman emphasised that when the recommendations were considered by Council, he would not vote on the matter, so as to mitigate the appearance of bias; he also noted that none of the parishes in his division were subject to any reviews and that therefore he could take dispassionate view during the deliberations of the Working Group.

The Chairman invited Ian Gibbons, Wiltshire Council's Monitoring Officer, to reiterate the advice he had given throughout the process, with regard to the position of members in relation to discussion and the provisions of bias and predetermination, with regard to formulation of recommendations. It was specifically noted that Cllr Jon Hubbard would withdraw from the Working Groups debate of any proposals that affected parishes within his division or parish for which he is a member but that Cllr Jon Hubbard would be able to debate and vote as a Wiltshire Councillor when the matter was considered by the meeting of Full Council. Mr Gibbons emphasised that the Council had satisfied itself that the process thus followed was in accordance with a law.

The Chairman stated that the Working Group would hold a meeting in Assembly Hall on 21st October and 4th November, the latter scheduled in response to criticism that the first two meetings had not been adequately publicised.

The Chairman noted that the Working Group had received a full submission by Melksham WO Parish Council in response to proposals.

3 Proposals

John Watling presented the maps showing the proposals. In summary the Working Group has looking at two options; the merger of the two parishes; or the 4 smaller schemes to be considered as an alternative.

At the meeting the agenda order was amended so that the larger scheme was presented and discussed first.

4 Whole Parish Merger

Bruce Sanders – Melksham Town Council

- That Bowerhill is not an old estate, and is relatively modern, and that he did not agree that Bowerhill that lose its identify;
- That the Melksham Town Council and Melksham WO could share resources, and work together more on common causes doing more for the community;
- That a merged Council would be better able to bear the burden of more devolved responsibilities; and

- That Melksham Town Council should benefit from new housing developments on the edge of the town.

Steve Gray - resident of Bowerhill and employee of Town Council

- That he was proud to live in Bowerhill, but he saw it as part of Melksham town; and
- That he wanted to see more working together and merger is best way to do that.

Comments against:

Cllr Mike Mills - Bowerhill and Berryhill Ward in Melksham Without Parish Council

- That he had not found a single resident of Bowerhill in favour of merger;
- That Bowerhill has clear village identity and boundaries, with its own school, hall, and action group doing environment work; and
- Bowerhill had been identified as a separate community in Wiltshire Council's Core Strategy, which recognised that there is a rural buffer that protects the distinct boundary.

Cll John Glover – Melksham Without Parish Council

- Thanked the legal officer for his advice, and the clarity on the position of members with interests;
- That the parish of Melksham Without is divided by clear boundaries i.e. the roads and open countryside;
- That the villages have their own identity from Melksham and from each other, and that each has their own village and community facilities, some provided by the parish; and
- That he saw no benefit to the merger, as the Councils do work together already, separately, on the Local Planning issues.

Cll Richard Wood – Melksham Without Parish Council

- That Melksham Without Parish Council and the Town Council work well when it is needed;
- That he did not feel there will be a huge savings arising from a merger; and
- That Melksham Without Parish Council had made proposals were the boundary could change to take into account of proposed new housing.

Bob Whiffing – Bowerhill resident and Scout Leader

- That Bowerhill had separate troop, which was an indication of different community identity;

- That he was concerned that the merger would benefit Melksham Town Council more than the communities of Melksham Without Parish Council;

Chris Eileen – Bowerhill Resident;

- That he had concern of the impact on building.

Cllr Stuart Wheeler stated, in response to an issue raised, that Parish Council boundaries do not have a significant impact on planning applications; but that can be relevant to the development of neighbourhood plans.

5 **Snarlton Lane/ Thyme Road Area (Melksham Without)**

Comments in support:

Cllr Alan Baines – Woodrow Road Resident, and Melksham Without Parish Council

- That the overhead powerline should mean that land near it may not be developed;
- That the new distributor road is a firm boundary; and
- That any new development would be well connected to the town, with residents using some facilities in the town

Cllr Rolf Brindel – Spa Road Resident, and Melksham Without Parish Council

- That he feels that Bowerhill has a separate identity; and
- That the proposed Eastern Road clearly defines the boundary for the eastern edge of the town.

Comments against:

There were no further comments.

Cllr Stuart Wheeler stated, in response to an issue raised, and with reference the guidance, that the working group can consider evidence of likely population movements arising from potential development, and was not restricted to considering the impact of housing with planning permission.

6 **A365 and Dunch Lane Junction**

Comments in support:

Cllr Richard Wood – Melksham Without Parish Council

- That the old boundary had followed an old estate boundary; and
- That it was an anomaly and needs to be moved to one parish.

Comments against:

There were no further comments.

7 Seend, Locking Close and the Canal

Cllr Mike Mills – Chair of Bowerhill Action Group, and Melksham Without Parish Council

- That the bridle path had been paid for by s106 agreement;
- That there is a community run picnic area on the land;
- That Seend Parish Council did not appear to be interested in managing the land; and
- That the Canal is the sensible boundary.

Teresa Strange – Melksham Without Parish Council

- That the Parish Council need to ask permission from Seend Parish Council to then collect rubbish on Seend's land.

Comments against:

Cllr Kevin Rigg – Seend Parish Council

- That he had replied to the consultation and was opposed to what he saw as a land grab;
- That he saw the land as a buffer between to the two villages, and had concerns over the impact of its removal on community identity;
- That in general, there is substantial investment in the community and large number of developments in the pipeline;
- That if the town continues to grow, then it may make sense to merge the councils, but until a plan is more clear supports Bowerhill remaining separate.

Steve Valks – Member of Seend Planning Group

- Land is important in Seend's Plan, concerned over negative impact.

8 Land Between Berryfield Lane and River Avon

Comments in support:

Cllr Alan Baines – Woodrow Road Resident, and Melksham Without Parish Council

- That it makes sense that it is joined to Melksham WO as that is the authority to the East of the river

Comments against:

There were no further comments.

9 Close

The Chairman informed the meeting that recommendations will be taken to the Full council meeting on the 24 November.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting, and drew attention to the additional meetings to be held in the Assembly Hall Melksham on the 21 October and 4 November.

(Duration of meeting: 7.00 - 8.07 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Jessica Croman, of Democratic Services, direct line , e-mail

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