

## WORKING GROUP ON PARISH & COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

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**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE WORKING GROUP ON PARISH & COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2015 AT ASSEMBLY HALL - MELKSHAM ASSEMBLY HALL, MARKET PLACE, MELKSHAM, SN12 6ES.**

**Present:**

Cllr Ernie Clark, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Ian McLennan and Cllr Stuart Wheeler

**Also Present:**

John Watling  
Ian Gibbons  
Paul Taylor  
Fiona Rae

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**10 Welcome & Introductions**

The Chairman welcomed those present and introduced the panel.

**11 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.

**12 Proposals**

Maps were presented showing the proposals.

**12a Snarlton Lane/ Thyme Road Area**

**Comments in support:**

Nick Westbrook

- The new community in this area has been created in a similar way to Bowerhill. Most of the population is concentrated in two blocks and we

need to find ways of absorbing them into the wider community.

Lisa Ellis

- As a resident of Bowerhill, doesn't particularly identify with that area. Would you consider merging the area to the south?
- Cllr Wheeler: can only look at proposals in front of us for now. But alternative proposals could be suggested in the future.

John Glover

- Melksham Without suggested and support this proposal.

**Comments against:**

None.

**Additional comments/ questions:**

Richard Bean

- Resident of Shaw.
- A large number of houses about to be built between Shaw and Shurnhold. Will be large population expansion if Melksham town have to absorb them.

**13 Whole Parish Merger**

**Comments in support:**

Paul Carter, resident of Melksham

- Concerns about governance if the whole merger were to go ahead. Believes that Melksham would be best served by one council.
- All Wiltshire Council-owned assets in the area should be transferred to the parish council – e.g. playing fields, toilets. Then residents of town can decide what is best for the town. Stronger form of democracy.
- Cllr Stuart Wheeler clarified that this review does not deal with transfer of assets.

Terri Welsh, Melksham Town Council

- Melksham Town Council has to pay for Assembly Hall, etc. Wiltshire Council is transferring more services to the community.
- The bigger the area, the better the community will be placed to deal with increased financial pressures.

Adrienne Westbrook

- It is important that Melksham has a strong voice. At the moment, the voice is disjointed. Excellent councils but disjointed voices of inhabitants.
- The Town and Parish councils don't have the power needed to help Wiltshire Council put the money in this town. The only solution is through strength. Need united council.

Nick Westbrook, Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, Community Area Partnership

- Size of Melksham when combined – population of 28,000 – just behind Chippenham. Third largest area in county excepting Salisbury.
- There are some governance concerns in Melksham Without. Will the proposal for a single council involve re-warding area so there is a fairer distribution of representation for the area – especially Shaw, Whitley, Beanacre etc? This information about the consequences of the merger is needed in order to make an informed decision, taking representation and precepts into account.
- Cllr Wheeler explained that if the whole parish merger was adopted by full council, the panel would then request authority to consider the area, including how it would be warded and what an appropriate number of councillors would be, in consultation with councils. It was also explained that the next elections were in May 2017 and no changes to boundaries would be made before then.
- Cllr Wheeler: precepts – government conditions – cannot take into account different precepts. Should not and cannot form part of deliberations. It was also explained that, under FAQs, there is information about precepts and variation and that the panel cannot predict the effect of proposals on precepts.

Brian Warwick, Older Persons' Champion, Melksham Seniors

- One council will overcome some equity and equality issues.
- Concerned about infrastructure side. Facilities required to service any community are closely linked to community identity. Majority of facilities are in Melksham Town Council.
- Seniors cover whole Melksham Area Board area – majority of activities are biased to town (52% in Melksham Town, 48% Melksham Without). There would be advantages for Melksham people if there were just one council.
- Opportunity to put right structures and support in place. Stronger voice for Melksham – focus on people of Melksham, support and facilities – one council speaking on our behalf. Need to be very positive and think about the future of Melksham.
- Strong community identity – from 'Melksham'. E.g. grants are given to out-of-parish areas.

Janet Giles, Seend resident

- If the whole merger goes ahead, would the secondary bits still happen?
- Cllr Wheeler explained that he did not want to anticipate the full council decision. But if whole merger was decided, the other proposals would likely be looked at again.

Elizabeth Bean, Shaw resident

- No idea of other people's comments or the bigger picture regarding the consultation. Would it be possible to make this a vote/ referendum?
- Cllr Wheeler explained that the decision was reserved to full council. NB he would not be voting on any of the proposals. Can contact unitary councillors. There will be a summary of responses.

Graham Ellis, Melksham Without resident

- Disappointed that the proposals don't look ahead to what local representation would be. Worries from some members of the public could be mitigated with some more information about this.
- There is very little funding for transport projects in Melksham – would argue that this is partly due to smaller size of Melksham. Combining numbers would help deal with this.

### **Comments against:**

Alan Baines, Melksham Without Parish Council

- Advantages of large council are dubious. Almost creating a district – why stop there? Why not include Atworth, Broughton Gifford, Seend etc. But we had those previously before the creation of Wiltshire Unitary Council.
- The proposals will be Melksham centric. Qualities of smaller villages are being threatened – would be urban dominated council.
- Local Government Boundary Commission advice suggests (clause 114) that it may be preferable to group parishes to form common parish council. Creation of new parishes or abolition of very small parishes would be inappropriate to create an artificially large unit. E.g. Wiltshire doesn't include Swindon. Big difference between urban and rural areas. This proposal would create an artificially large unit.
- Separate urban voice and rural voice and balance between the two is very important. Melksham Without covers largest rural area in Wiltshire. Creates an artificially large unit, retrograde step.

John Glover

- In Melksham Without, different villages have their own identities, e.g. own village halls.

- There are limitations placed on councils and how much they can give out in grants – 2 councils doesn't equal 2x the grant.
- Some residents from Bowerhill commented that they did not identify with Melksham and believed that residents from other outlying areas would feel the same.
- Melksham Without provides a voice for the villages around Melksham. Some residents believed that this voice would be lost with the merger.
- Bowerhill has clearly designated boundaries and clear identity. People are proud to live there.

**Additional comments/ questions:**

Colin Goodhind, Longford Road resident

- Was in support of whole merger as it would be better funded, easier for people to understand. Needs to know what the opportunity will be to find out more information about re-warding and costs to local people.

John McNeilage, Shaw resident

- Confusion over the whole merger. Would like to know how many councillors would be in the new plan or the new ward layout. Without an idea of what the proposals would entail, people would be very uncomfortable in providing positive feedback.

14 **A365 and Dunch Lane Junction**

**Comments in support:**

Mr Bean

- Clear distinction of where boundary should run. Added advantage that it brings in more money to the town council.
- Current boundary goes through field – houses are already in the town. No change for them.

John McNeilage

- In favour of the logical and obvious new boundary.

**Comments against:**

None.

**Additional comments/ questions:**

Brian Warwick

- Hopes it will be very clear where boundary lines are and where individual properties are.
- Unclear splits have caused lots of problems in the past and it is always better not to split communities.

## 15 **Seend, Locking Close and the Canal**

### **Comments in support:**

Teresa Strange

- Picnic area in the proposed change area – developed solely by a Bowerhill group, including the maintenance of the site. Also funded by Melksham Without Parish Council. If the area of land was within Melksham Without, there would be more convenient and effective local services: volunteers would be covered under insurance, and Melksham Without would no longer have to ask Seend permission to go on land.
- Parish boundaries should align to obvious physical boundaries which the proposal ensures.

John Glover

- There is no reason why 3d and 3e cannot be decided alongside any decision of whether there is a whole merger.

### **Comments against:**

Janet Giles

- Other proposals concerned new property builds, large number. This change of land must mean that there are plans for a new development. Cllr Wheeler clarified that parish boundaries have nothing to do with planning permissions.
- Doesn't want to lose part of parish, no logical reason – all parishes are different sizes.
- It is a very small area.
- Doesn't want to have to ask permission to go on land. It was clarified that Janet Giles wouldn't have to ask permission to go on her land.

### **Additional comments/ questions:**

Mary Jarvis

- Create an area of land common to Seend and Melksham Without – both sets of residents enjoy usage of the area.

16 **Land Between Berryfield Lane and River Avon**

**Comments in support:**

Brian Warwick

- The proposal would overcome problems of ownership.

**Comments against:**

Mary Jarvis, Clerk of Broughton Gifford

- Defensive of territory. Think it's a splendid anomaly. Thinks that landscape will change anyway with the canal – the canal could be another physical feature to determine parish boundaries.
- Would prefer it to be left as it is.

**Additional comments/ questions:**

None.

17 **Close**

(Duration of meeting: 7.00 - 8.00 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Fiona Rae, of Democratic Services

Press enquiries to Communications, direct line (01225) 713114/713115

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