



Wiltshire Council Community Governance Review

Salisbury City and Laverstock and Ford Parishes

Salisbury City Council Final Submission to the Review

16 June 2016

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Part 1 - Executive Summary

1. Salisbury City Council (**SCC**) supports the merger of the whole of the two existing civil parishes currently known as The City of Salisbury (**Salisbury** or the **City**) and Laverstock and Ford (**L&F**) into a single new parish to be known as The City of Salisbury (alternatively styled as The City of New Sarum).
2. SCC also supports the merger of the two existing parish councils to form a single new council to be known as Salisbury City Council. It assumes that any merger would take effect after the next scheduled local elections in May 2017.
3. The merger could be implemented by the constitution of a new parish by amalgamation pursuant to section 87(2)(d) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the **Act**) with a new parish council formed under Section 87(4) or by the alteration of the boundaries of one of the parishes and the abolition of the other under Section 88(2)(b) and (c) with consequential provisions as to parish councils and names. SCC would support whichever method Wiltshire Council (**WC**) considers to be most efficient and effective.
4. SCC considers that the new parish should have wards throughout and an odd number of members between 19 and 29. It has no formed view on the precise number of members or boundaries of wards for the merged entity. Whilst a full boundary review would be the best solution, simply adding 4 members for the unwarded L&F areas to the 23 members for SCC's warded areas – allocated three per ward by reference to the 9 current Wiltshire council divisions, would be an acceptable short-term solution enabling implementation by May 2017 with no impact on WC divisions, if time were to be an issue.
5. SCC considers that a merger best meets the objectives of the Review for the area under review, as the outcome would better reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area and be more effective and convenient than the current two parish arrangement. This Review offers a rare opportunity for parish level governance in the area to evolve to reflect current physical realities whilst strengthening democratic participation and accountability; enhancing the convenience, efficiency and effectiveness of local government and ensuring fairness of participation, access to resources and contribution amongst all residents. Our comments on the objectives and area are in Part 2. Details as to why the objectives are met are in Parts 3 to 10. In summary they are that:
 - a. A merger would create unequivocal and enduring fairness of participation, contribution and benefit.

- b. Both Salisbury and L&F are already amalgamations of multiple neighbourhoods with distinct and very local identities that form parts of a single urban area with an overarching Salisbury identity.
- c. Both areas have changed significantly since the last review in 1954 and merger would reflect their present and near future built reality.
- d. There would be clear green space and a lasting natural boundary around the merged area.
- e. A single entity would improve cohesion, but no neighbourhood identities would be lost. Improved parish level capacity would create an opportunity to enhance them.
- f. The interests of residents in a more democratic and accountable representation would be fully met in practice as well as in theory.
- g. A merged parish council could effectively manage the entire public realm and support all of the communal activities of the area.
- h. Local governance capacity and efficiency would be improved enabling the devolution policy of Wiltshire Council to be implemented with greater speed and effectiveness.

Part 2 – Objectives and Area of the Community Governance Review (CGR)

Section 81(2) of the Act requires each CGR's Terms of Reference (**TOR**) to identify the "area under review". WC's TORs for this review, approved on 24 February 2014, do not expressly do so. However, those TORs do refer in their descriptive sections to "the Internal and external boundaries of Salisbury and neighbouring parishes and associated seating arrangements". The modification approved by resolution of the council on 24 November 2015 (minute 89 refers) expressly referred to both the City and L&F when instituting the current merger and associated reviews. It is therefore clear that the "area under review" is the whole of the two parishes and the interests to be considered are those of the entire area. WC has not consulted equally with all residents in the area under review, but SCC has tried to fill this gap with its own consultation in the City.

CGRs do not have express objectives. They form part of the general law of English local government and fit within its general scheme. The 2010 DCLG/LGBCE statutory Guidance on Community Governance Reviews (the **Guidance**) states that

- Parish Councils "*should be viable in terms of providing at least some local services*" (Guidance, para. 63). This was important in 2010 and is even more so now with more pressure on services and reducing support from central and higher tiers of local government.
- Parish Councils should "*take more responsibility for shaping their area's development and running its services*" (Guidance, para. 65).
- Parishes should be "*well-run, with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership*" (Guidance, para. 47).
- Providing "*accountable*" governance and "*strategic, visionary leadership*".
- With "*inclusive, active and effective participation*" by individuals and organisations.
- And "*engagement at neighbourhood level, including capacity building*".

As members know, when considering these issues WC must “*have regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area under review –*

(a) reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area, and

(b) is effective and convenient” (Section 93(4) of the Act).

It is important to note that these are issues to which WC must have regard. This means that they are important but not stand-alone objectives of any review. The wider objectives of local governance identified in the Guidance need to be met when any recommendations are made. No one aspect of the Section 93 criteria predominates and WC must take a balanced view of them. It is difficult to see how the statement in Appendix C of the TORS that “the feeling of the local community and the wishes of local inhabitants are *primary* (emphasis added) considerations in this Review” fits the required balance, particularly if applied to an area less than that of the whole area under review. Citizens’ views and wishes are of course important, but they are not the only factor and in our view WC must, as in all its actions, consider the positions of the majority who do not take part in consultations as well as the minority that do.

The Review must be forward looking and strategic in its considerations. The last equivalent one in the area was in 1954, 62 years ago, following others in 1904 and 1927. The absence of any review since 1954 is partly explained by the abolition of parish government in the City between 1954 and the creation of WC in 2009.

The Guidance suggests that ‘best practice’ is now for a review every 10 to 15 years (paragraph 26), but another lifetime passing before the next is equally likely.

The review therefore needs to consider the interests of future as well as current residents, with the aim of “securing” improved governance for years to come. On boundaries that should “*be and be likely to remain*” easily identifiable (Guidance, para. 83)

The Review’s recommendations “*ought to bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services*” (Guidance, para. 23).

The Review should also produce governance that makes communities “*cohesive, attractive and economically vibrant*” (Guidance, para. 46)

And it must “*Consider the impact on community cohesion*” (Guidance, para. 53) where a “*key contributor to community cohesion is integration*” rather than fragmentation (Guidance, para. 69) and where a cohesive community can “*meet the challenges and opportunities of their area in a co-ordinated way*” (Guidance, para. 57) with people who “*trust local institutions to act fairly*” (Guidance, para. 70)

So it is not enough that the current arrangements are satisfactory or even good. With all of these considerations in mind we must consider - Can they be better?

SCC believes that with merger they can be.

Part 3 – Some Local History

Salisbury is well known as a planned medieval new town, built in chequers within walls to serve the great new Cathedral that still lies at its heart and gives it a powerful focal point and sense of identity. The original site of the settlement still survives at the Iron Age hill fort, Roman town and Norman castle and former Cathedral of Old Sarum. The new City received its charter in 1227 and stayed within its three parishes, Cathedral Close, walls and ditches for centuries. Rural villages that were gradually organised into church parishes, including Fisherton, Bemerton, Harnham, Quidhampton, Milford, Stratford and Laverstock, surrounded it. By 1835 it had grown beyond its early limits and finally expanded its administrative boundaries to catch up. Throughout this period the land to the east and north of the City was within the parishes of Milford and Stratford, within the Hundred of Underditch (as shown on the map at *Appendix B*). Laverstock parish lay entirely east of the River Bourne, in the Alderbury Hundred, including none of modern Milford, Bishopdown or Old Sarum and only parts of Ford. Its parish council came into existence in 1894 as part of the general spread of such civil councils at that time.

Medieval Salisbury was surrounded by land owned by the Church or great estates (Clarendon, Longford and Wilton) that could not or would not sell freeholds. It therefore first grew where land was available, mostly to the west, first taking in Fisherton parish. In the later nineteenth century it started to grow south, north and east as well, particularly into Milford, which as a result was divided into Milford Within and Milford Without. This growth led to progressive extensions of the City boundary. Their general extent is shown in the map at *Appendix C*, taken from the Victoria County History. The transfers eventually included all of Harnham and Bemerton, large parts of Netherhampton and Quidhampton and much of Milford Without (including Bishopdown) and Stratford. When these parishes were finally abolished (in either 1927 or 1954, the VCH is contradictory on the date) the final urban parts were taken into the City and the then undeveloped remainders were transferred to Laverstock to form Laverstock and Ford Parish. These transfers included Milford beyond the Bourne, the area between the river and railway that is now the site of the River Bourne Community Farm (explaining why the City held the land until transfer on reorganisation in 2009), land north of Bishopdown Farm, the rest of Ford and the Old Sarum airfield site from Stratford.

Since the last review in 1954 development has made the then sparsely populated parish of L&F home to a series of separate settlements that in their form and function are urban extensions of Salisbury.

Those settlements include the Milford extension around Queen Manor Road; Laverstock Village; Hampton Park/Riverdown Park; Ford; Old Sarum. Development included the LEA's move of three of Salisbury's six secondary schools to a new site in Laverstock (from Highbury Avenue [Wyvern College]; St Edmunds Church [St Edmunds School] and Exeter Street [St Joseph's – the then senior school element of St Osmund's]) in a 1961 reorganisation.

Part 4 – Local Geography

A few thousand residents living in continuous but pleasantly spaced houses, a handful surviving from the pre-1850 rural past, the remainder planned and ordered streets, estates and closes; with two churches, a few shops, three pubs, sports facilities, halls, a primary school; spread along a principal road between a wood-topped hillside and a river, linked across its meadows to the city centre barely a mile away by two road bridges and a footpath, with uninterrupted farmland stretching away from its outer boundaries.

This is Harnham. Part of Salisbury for decades and served by SCC.

Change 1850 to 1950 - deduct a church and two pubs, add three secondary schools and you have Laverstock, served not by SCC but by Laverstock and Ford Parish Council.

The ringed map at *Appendix A* shows how both Harnham and Laverstock are located within the same distance of the City centre (between 1km and 2km away) and have otherwise very similar geographies, leading to similar impacts on the lives of those who live there.

Such close comparisons, of characteristics, distance from and relationship to the City centre, could also be made between, for example, Bemerton Heath and Old Sarum (plus an airfield) but could not be made between any of them and Odstock or Redlynch, Whiteparish or Winterbourne, or any other of Wiltshire's many rural settlements, whose size, composition, layout and distance from a major service centre are quite different, perhaps most notably that they are not within easy cycling or walking distance of that centre.

Both parishes are fine places to live, containing an unusual abundance of green and open space, largely derived from the famous five rivers. But the City now has within its boundaries *more* commercial farmland; *more* meadow; *more* woodland, *more* hectares of County Wildlife sites, *more* farmland within environmental stewardship schemes and *more* publicly owned open space than Laverstock and Ford. In both parishes the surviving commercial farmland is concentrated on the fringes and generally farmed from sites outside the parish. Much is designated for development in the near future.

This reflects the transformation of L&F parish since 1945 by the building of housing and facilities on an urban pattern and scale, with hundreds of houses in multi-road developments. Only Ford is a partial exception to this. It has its estate but also roads without pavements. The transformation in character is confirmed by the presence in L&F of those sure identifiers of an urban area – a Community Farm and a (planned) Country Park (rural villages have agri-business farms and countryside).

The consequences of this geography are that residents of the various parts of L&F interact with and use City facilities, including those provided by SCC, in very similar ways to residents of other neighbourhoods such as Harnham, Bemerton, Fugglestone and Bishopdown within the City at similar distances from the centre.

This geography also means that L&F neighbourhoods have little common identity, beyond that constructed around the institution of the Civil Parish. There are few physical connections between them and little reason for residents of one to have more to do with the others than with the adjacent City, which provides their services above the neighbourhood level.

Part 5 – Perception by Residents and Others

Local identity within Laverstock and Ford is fragmented. It exists at a neighbourhood level, for example people say that they live in Laverstock *or* live in Ford – not that they live in Laverstock *and* Ford. Old Sarum residents simply live at Old Sarum. L&F PC's own activities recognise this. Despite the absence of wards its members are consciously drawn from and allocated to the different neighbourhoods.

The confusion of identity has been manifest even in the campaign conducted around this Review. For example the latest L&F PC magazine Boundary Review Special states on page 11 that “The Schools cannot be considered to be Salisbury Schools” (perhaps surprising given their origins and pupil composition) whilst the page 3 Editorial quotes with (deserved) approval the Head Teacher of St Andrew's School's letter stating that its mini-marathon is “very much part of the Salisbury Schools calendar”.

Many L&F residents describe themselves as living in Salisbury. They certainly buy houses there, as new houses at Hampton Park, Riverdown Park, Longhedge and Old Sarum have been and continue to be prominently advertised and described as being in Salisbury.

Both public and private sectors have long operated in accordance with the physical reality of treating both parishes as a single settlement. The Anglican Church Parishes of Salisbury St Marks and Laverstock St Andrews were merged some years ago. Voluntary groups, charities, scouts, guides and many others operate without distinction across the parishes. The City Mayor is routinely invited to attend events in L&F, as a local representative, not a visitor. Salisbury Football Club (and before it Salisbury City FC) is based at Old Sarum.

Wiltshire Council treated the two parishes as so connected that its new Divisions created in 2009 were based on a combination – creating a cross-parish Division and attendance at Salisbury Area Board by Laverstock and Ford Parish Council. The Core Strategy treats them as a single sustainable entity. This is not new. As long ago as 1947 the influential book “A Newer Sarum” which set the scope for much local post-war development included Laverstock as a site for a City neighbourhood (since built) and leading local history “Endless Street” referred to Laverstock's particularly close relationship to the City by the 1980s.

WC's Joint Strategic Assessment refers to the impact of the new housing developments at Longhedge (within L&F) in its Salisbury Area report, but not in its Southern Area report. Indeed, although it makes up the largest population centre within the Southern Area (matched only by Downton) the JSA barely mentions L&F. There are no photos of it and only two text references – once referring to the existence of urban land within the Area (presumably Laverstock) and once referring to its unusually high level of children living in poverty. It appears to be an overlooked anomaly within its own WC area.

Part 6 – Consultation Results

WC will have its own responses to the consultation carried out in a limited part of the area affected by this review. L&F PC carried out a household consultation in the recent past. Its outcome strongly opposed merger, but the consultation was heavily focused on the impact of a merger on precept levels, as has been the whole of the vigorous campaign run by L&F PC ever since, which never fails to emphasise this point. As WC members know, the level of precept is not a relevant consideration in CGRs, although its incidence may be. So who pays to whom matters, but not how much.

SCC carried out its own qualitative surveys in the City. The results are attached at *Appendix D*. They show a level of support for the merger between 80% and 99%, from responses not exclusive to City residents, based on shared identity and common contribution and benefit.

Part 7 - Effective and Convenient

The direction of travel in local government is clear – Parishes must do more, or lose out. The general power of competence has been made available to help achieve this. SCC has this power. Unusually for a parish of its size, L&F does not, as it has insufficient elected members and an unqualified clerk.

Despite having no premises costs, in the last three financial years L&F spent 74% of its precept income on the pay, payroll taxes and office costs of its Clerk – who received a 16.5% pay rise in the period. Other than R2 and s.106 development contributions it has few other sources of income. Not surprisingly it provides few services and has no obvious capacity to take on any that WC may wish to transfer to it.

In contrast two-thirds of City income does not come from the precept. SCC has healthy reserves and regular annual budget surpluses. It has a strong asset base, significant capacity to borrow on favourable terms and the ability to finance and deliver major capital projects through the wide capability of full-time staff, extensive equipment and a permanent home. It is likely that an area subject to new development on the scale of L&F, notably at Old Sarum, will require significant spending on the provision and long-term maintenance of new community facilities. SCC has a proven track-record in delivering such projects. L&F PC does not. SCC can and does own and manage large areas of green space and has the capacity to acquire more.

SCC operates a community grants scheme of significant size. The L&F grant limit is £300. SCC's has made one-off community grants of up to £15,000 and provides on-going core funding and free facilities to several community, sports and arts groups. SCC believes that substantial suppressed demand for community facilities and open space support exists within L&F, which merger would release and allow to be met.

A key element of local government effectiveness is democratic representation. SCC has an all-elected membership. Every ward has been fully contested at every election. The democratic choice given to City residents is real and effectively exercised, with electoral outcomes producing real change. We have been unable to find any record of a contested election for membership of L&F PC. Indeed there are frequently vacancies in its membership, including now.

SCC is represented in larger Wiltshire-wide bodies, giving a voice to its residents within them. L&F is not.

SCC is to be the pilot of a programme of substantial asset and service transfer from WC. The services are significant in size and scope and relate mostly to the public realm of the City, such as grounds maintenance, CCTV and street cleaning. The benefit will be felt by all who use the City's centre and green spaces regularly, which will include residents of L&F. L&F PC will need a major change in capacity and resource if it is to take on its share of these tasks as the WC programme rolls out. Merging with SCC will be the most, perhaps the only, effective way of meeting the challenge and making the most of the opportunities such devolution presents.

Part 8 - Ford

SCC recognises that the hamlet of Ford is a slight anomaly within the anomalous parish of L&F. Although it lacks any of the usual (although frequently disappearing) facilities of a typical rural village, having no church, pub or shop, parts of Ford have a pattern, scale and feel that have significant similarities to one. So whilst it would find a welcome and effective home in the City, we see that it could fairly (if perhaps inefficiently) be a separate parish, either for the first time on its own or by merger with a fully rural neighbour such as Hurdcott, perhaps using its old name of Winterbourne Ford, if that is appealing to Wiltshire Council members. We suggest no precise boundaries, but roughly the edge of the airfield, the edge of the Riverdown Park development, the river Bourne and the existing North East boundary.

Part 9 – The Bishopdown/Hampton Park Options

We hope that the full merger proposal will be approved. If it is not SCC supports the inclusion of all of Hampton Park and Riverdown Park in the City, and opposes the transfer of Bishopdown Farm to Laverstock and Ford.

The reasons above apply with particular emphasis to the administration of three new housing areas planned and functioning as a single neighbourhood with a local school, shop and community hall, reliant on and closely connected to the City. The rest of L&F is separated from it by a River and/or a railway line.

In respect of that part of Bishopdown Farm in the City we are aware that L&F PC have claimed that it has previously been part of L&F parish. Our research has found no evidence of this. The area was certainly in Milford, then Milford Without. We believe it transferred to the City when Milford Without was finally abolished, probably in 1954, when the area to the north, then empty fields but now Hampton Park and Riverdown Park, became part of L&F. The confusion appears to relate to the divisional/ward boundaries of Wiltshire County Council and Salisbury District Council, then Wiltshire Council and how and when they crossed parish boundaries rather than the parish boundaries themselves.

Part 10 – Summary

Our two communities both deserve and need capable and accountable local government. In the near future both parishes will (hopefully) be considered to be ‘developed out’. This will mean the end of developer funded community provision – but not the end of demand. Maintenance funds run out and an area must eventually rely on its own resources. It will not be enough to consult and specify, asking others to provide. Action will be needed. SCC already has very limited reliance on developer funding, the need for which is a double-edged sword. The effectiveness of its governance in the future is secured.

Our proposal could create the same long-term security for Laverstock and Ford, as a merged parish council could do more at a time when higher levels of government will be doing less.

It would be more capable and more accountable, but still 100% focused on a shared local area, rather than distant parts of the County.

The two parish communities are neighbours and full of friends. Their neighbourhood identities would be maintained and activities could be better supported.

All residents would have an equal right to share in the resources of the City, giving them long-term freedom from dependence on development contributions and membership of a capable ‘doing’ authority with unlimited powers to promote well being.

All residents of both areas have an interest in fairness. Wiltshire Council’s policy has raised a double fairness issue: If my parish council provides a locally-funded service to me – should I also contribute to the cost of its provision in other parishes? Wiltshire Council says no – service devolution will eventually be the same for all. But should all who benefit from services in the same way – not as occasional visitors but with the regularity of neighbours – contribute in the same way – financially and electorally? This is the core question underlying all boundary reviews. In a country with ever-growing settlements the answer has always been ‘Yes, they should’.

We hope it will continue to be in this case and that Wiltshire Council will agree with the logic of our proposal and give us an administrative structure that lays the foundations for the collaborative long-term improvement of our whole area.

This submission should be read in conjunction with our submissions to the public consultation events and the wider, earlier whole City consultations. It amalgamates, summarises and in part expands upon those earlier submissions, as well as including specific requests as to the statutory recommendations to be made.

Appendices:

- A. Map of Salisbury showing 1km rings from the centre.
- B. Map showing the Underditch Hundred
- C. Map showing Salisbury boundary extensions since 1835
- D. SCC consultation responses