

Additional Evidence against Motion 27 from Laverstock and Ford Parish Council for the Community Governance Review Working Group

A. Additional Evidence With Respect to the Community Governance Review Criteria

1. A sense of civic pride and civic values

Our Parish Newsletter ([link to latest copy](#)) is full of evidence of the civic pride and civic values that exist in our Parish and sustained by our Parish Council. There is a particular focus on our rural heritage, including the historic World War I Airfield, chalk downlands – celebrated annually through the South Wiltshire school’s mini marathon, our country trails and rural greenspaces. The Open Farm Sunday event in our Parish is one of the most popular in the Country with up to 6,000 visitors attending the event from across South Wiltshire.

2. A strong, inclusive community and voluntary sector

We have received five grant applications from different community organisations in the last two months demonstrating the strength of our community and voluntary sector. In one example of the inclusivity that exists, two community organisations each submitted grant claims for equipment and infrastructure (a projector and improved blinds for Laverstock Village Hall) that will be for the benefit of all community groups using the Hall.

3. A strong sense of place and local distinctiveness

In common with all Parishes that lie close to a major town or city, businesses, new housing developments and educational institutions and even housing allocation zones for planning purposes will reference Salisbury as the main geographical location. However this is merely shorthand for “in the Salisbury Area” and does not detract from the strong sense of place that residents, students, workers and visitors in our Parish enjoy. The genuine sense of loss expressed by numerous residents and most recently the school leadership at the prospect of a merger is conclusive evidence of this fact.

4. Effective engagement with the local community

The equivalent of a third our residents as measured by unique visitors currently visit our website during any one month and all residents receive a hardcopy of our Parish Newsletter. Our Parish Plan was developed through two years of consultation including attendance at popular community events, on-line survey and public open meetings. We plan to either revise our Parish Plan or undertake a Neighbourhood Plan once the Boundary Review process has been completed.

5. Strong local leadership

We have effectively engaged with the planning proposals for housing development at Old Sarum Airfield and the new settlements of Longhedge, Old Sarum and Riverdown Park. In all cases, with the exception of the Airfield, we have successfully worked in partnership with the developers to

secure additional resources for our local community and help the developers improve the quality of the resulting settlements.

B. The Legal Basis For A Merger

Motion 27 from the Nov 2015 Wiltshire Council meeting called for the Working Group to 'investigate and consult on the merger of Laverstock and Ford Parish into Salisbury City Parish'. The word 'merge' is described in the dictionary as 'to lose character and identity'. This is certainly not what the vast majority of the other residents in our parish want, a fact that has been made strongly at both public meetings. Furthermore, the common usage of the word 'merge' implies 2 or more bodies or organisations seeing the advantages of merging and all agree to do so. In this case there is only one proponent for this merger – Salisbury City. Our residents and Parish Council totally disagree with the proposal. The bottom line is that this is, in effect, an aggressive take-over bid which, if it should succeed, would lead to the abolition of the parish and its council with the latter wound up and dissolved by a reorganisation order. This action would bring with it all the warnings identified in para 122 of the Guidance for Community Governance Reviews.

C. Inaccuracies In Motion 27

Considering each of the significant points from the Motion 27 in turn:

1. 'very concerned that this has not been included as one of the options for consideration in this review'

This statement is incorrect as the Working Group consultation in 2015 did include consideration of the Salisbury City Council's (SCC) wish to incorporate Laverstock and Ford (L&F) Parish within Salisbury City. This proposal was considered but was rejected as they believed there was no case to answer. There have been no significant changes since then, however, regardless of this we are now forced to 'go round the buoy' again.

2. 'Laverstock is very much part of the city; and 3 of Salisbury's 6 secondary schools are located in Laverstock.'

The L&F Parish is set in a pleasant and rural area with many of its own open spaces and is not part of a city. The schools, as well as Salisbury City (SC), serve many villages to the east of Salisbury, including L&F. Therefore, they cannot be considered as SC Schools. Indeed, St Edmunds serves some 44 different communities. They are very much part of the L&F communities and regular meetings take place between the Parish Council and schools on community matters with cups awarded by the Parish Council annually to students. (See letter from the 3 secondary school Head Teachers together with the neighbouring primary school Head Teacher which unequivocally opposes a merger and confirms how well L&F Parish Council works with the schools.)

3. 'Residents of Laverstock enjoy all the services provided by Salisbury City Council yet do not pay for them (they) are subsidised by all the other Salisbury residents. This is clearly not fair.'

Businesses would be the first to recognise that it is visitors to the city who sustain it and not the size of the local population. All who use the Guildhall and Crematorium pay to use them. Parking is expensive and paid for by those visitors that use it and is not a subsidised provision. Significantly, these points are applicable to visitors from surrounding Parishes, other parts of Wiltshire, the rest of

the country and indeed from abroad; therefore, why single out this particular parish? Perhaps in reality visitors can be considered as subsidising the City of Salisbury.

4. ‘Genuine concern that much treasured village identity of Laverstock would be threatened by joining SCC.....’

The L&F communities have a historic background with the origins of Laverstock going back to the Neolithic period with very active pottery kilns in medieval times. Bringing the story up to date, they now have their own Community Farm and will soon have their own Country Park. The Parish Council was formed under the Local Government Act in 1894. The Parish is run in a very efficient manner with only one part time clerk. L&F Parish Council is non-political and run solely for the benefit of its residents. A merged City Parish would mean that the number of Parish Councillors representing the current residents would fall to 4 out of the total of 27 for the merged Parish.

5. ‘To omit this option from the Review would be to perpetuate a democratic anomaly and miss a key opportunity to put right a historic wrong.’

It is not clear why living in a efficiently run parish with a Parish Council which is non -political and run solely for the benefit of its residents can be a democratic anomaly and an historic wrong. Perhaps the anomaly is what is not said; a realignment of boundaries to merge the two Parishes would mean a financial gain to the City of some £300,000 due to L&F residents paying an inflated council tax for the pleasure of sitting within a changed SC boundary.

6. ‘There is no longer a viable distinction between the two parishes ‘

The rural aspects of L&F and its distinctive facilities ensure that it is not appropriate to merge the Parish with a city. These features, combined with the ability of its Council to run it efficiently, ensure that L&F Parish is a viable independent parish.

D. The dearth of SC Parish residents who spoke in favour of Motion 27 at the public meetings.

It was notable that the few speakers who spoke in favour of Motion 27 at the Salisbury Public meeting were all in local public office or had previously been active in local public affairs. It was clear from the content of the speeches that they had been orchestrated by SCC or their supporting Wiltshire Councillors. In contrast numerous speakers spoke against the merger at both public meetings, putting forward a variety of well thought out arguments through their own volition.

E. The public criticism from the Chair of Salisbury BID re the linking of the asset transfer from Wiltshire Council to SCC to the vote on Motion 27 to merge L&F Parish Council with SCC.

Amanda Newbury, Chair of Salisbury Business Improvement District, commented on the behaviour of SCC in this respect as being “no way to do business”. In contrast we are in early conversation with the BID Chair to co-develop visionary proposals for the Longhedge and Old Sarum commercial areas, the Longhedge commercial area was successfully secured in part through the pro-active engagement by our Parish Council with the Developers for Longhedge.

F. The resignation of the Chair for the Salisbury CCTV scheme citing the “broken politics” which have led to SCC delaying the Asset Transfer process until after Wiltshire Council has voted on Motion 27.

One of the authors of Motion 27, Wiltshire Councillor Richard Clewer, stated it would be “quite wrong” for SCC to link the asset transfer with the outcome of Motion 27 but SCC have made it abundantly clear that this is their intention. On this basis alone Motion 27 should be withdrawn.

G. The lack of letters to the press from Salisbury residents saying they want a merger.

To date there have been no letters of support from SC Parish residents for a merger of L&F Parish Council with SC Parish other than letters from SC Parish Councillors. This in contrast to numerous letters from residents from L&F Parish opposed to the merger.

H. The biased nature of the Salisbury City Parish campaigning leaflet to generate any kind of positive support for the Merger.

This leaflet which has been professionally produced at great expense to SC Parish residents only provides one option for respondents – a positive response for a Merger of L&F Parish Council with SC Parish Council. On this basis we would ask that any “evidence” it may generate is dismissed as irrelevant by the working group.

I. The Capacity of Laverstock and Ford Parish Council to take on more services.

SC Parish Council have made much of their capability to take on services from Wiltshire Council and inferred that L&F Parish Council has less capacity to do so. In fact the reverse is true. L&F Parish Council have a low precept because we are the more efficient Parish Council. We have developed a modern business model of small government supporting a large and resilient civil society. The point has been made by SC Parish Council that we are “living off developer contributions to maintain our community facilities that will run out in time.” Again the reverse is true. We are co-designing our greenspaces with developers so they can be sustainably managed through agricultural systems which are present in our Parish. By presenting opportunities for civil society organisations to take on management aspects of greenspaces and other community facilities, we can generate income for the benefit of the community ensuring that residents will not be burdened by increased taxation, as is the case for the maintenance of the formal, high maintenance greenspaces that SC Parish Council preside over. Furthermore, we plan to look into applying for a major Heritage Lottery Fund grant to further develop our new Country Park services once the Boundary Review process has been concluded. If the merger goes ahead, the combined Parishes would not be eligible to apply for this grant since SCC has already applied for and secured funding for its formal greenspaces under the same grant programme. The point was also made that the expanding role of Parish Councils to take on assets from Wiltshire Council could not be met by our hardworking Parish Clerk alone. We currently have made budgetary plans to recruit an Assistant Clerk in this financial year and would continue to expand our paid staff capacity at modest levels to meet the increasing administrative demands of our work.

J. Our Councillors are democratically elected.

SC Parish Council continues to claim that our Parish Councillors are not subject to the democratic process. This is not true. We are all subject to parish elections, the next one being in the Spring of 2017. Also the point was made that we do not have a full Parish Council. For the record we currently have two vacancies on a Parish Council of 13 with three residents expressing a firm interest in filling these vacancies. We will therefore have a waiting list once the two vacancies are filled.

K. We have the capacity and interest in delivering a Neighbourhood Plan

We have explored the merits of developing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and been advised by Wiltshire Council Spatial Planners that since we have been so effective at meeting housing needs set out in the current Core Strategy for Wiltshire that there is a strong argument for us not drawing up a NP.

The comment made by a SCCllr at Laverstock that we would have had protection from the Airfield development had we possessed a NP indicated lack of knowledge on the basic facts. NPs were only introduced by the Localism Act in 2011. There was a shake-down period in Wiltshire while the Wiltshire Council decided on the process to be used within the county. Indeed the first one in the country was only adopted in Mar 2013. Regrettably, the South Wilshire Core Strategy which flagged up the 3 areas on the airfield for potential development was adopted in 2012 (having been through the consultation process and obtaining an inspector's approval). This set in train, ultimately, the submission of the Planning Application. Hence the timeframe was against us - any NP we could have produced would have post-dated the adoption of the Core Strategy - it would have been too late!

L. A comment made at the Laverstock public meeting by a SCCllr on democracy

A case was made by a SCCllr that it is not fair or democratic that residents of L&F have no say in how facilities in the City are run, eg the City Hall or the Guild Hall. It is the case that residents have democracy now. They do not want to be part of the City or indeed have any say in the running of these facilities. This is their democratic right – forcing them to be part of the City organisation would not be democratic.

M. Corrections to statements made at the Salisbury public meeting by a SCCllr

It is not true to say that L&F PC did not support the Hampton Park community from the early days – it did. For example, when the residents no longer wished to run the Community Centre, the Parish Clerk stepped in for a period of time until a new group of residents formed a management organisation. And when this group wound up its activities in 2012 because of insurance issues, a company was formed and a parish Cllr stepped in to become one of the 5 Directors to manage it (and initially carry out the day-to-day running).

Also it was incorrect to say that the SCC had not been involved in the redesign of the Country Park at Hampton Park. L&F Cllrs, together with a design specialist, spoke with the City Clerk in the early days when an initial drawing of the proposed rural redesign was first available. The Clerk was content with what he saw.