

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Finance Governance & Asset Management Advisory Committee
Meeting date	18 January 2022
Report author	Town Clerk
Agenda item	14

Community Governance Review

1. **Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To update members regarding the Vale Community Governance Review and request members to raise any items which they wish to be considered as part of the council's

2. **Summary**

- 2.1 The district council are undertaking a Community Governance Review (CGR) during 2022 and have asked parish councils to give initial consideration to any matters they wish to be considered.
- 2.2 At the town council meeting on 1 December 2021 it was agreed that the Town Clerk would prepare a paper for the next meeting of the committee in consultation with Cllr Jim Halliday on parish boundaries, to enable comments from Councillors to be taken into account for the submission to the District Council.
- 2.3 The Town Council delegated authority to the Town Clerk to submit comments to the District Council on behalf of the Town Council in order to comply with the request from the district council to submit comments by 21 January 2022.

3. **Action required**

- 3.1 To note this report
- 3.2 To raise and discuss any matters which members wish the Town Clerk to consider as part of this council's submission to the district council.

4. **Link to strategic plan and objectives**

4.1 Key Objective 3: To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.

5. **Background**

5.1 A CGR previously took place during 2017/2018 and its recommendations were implemented in May 2019. This resulted in changes to the boundary so that land which is part of the north and north-west Abingdon developments was transferred to Abingdon from the neighbouring parishes of Radley, St Helen Without and Sunningwell. As part of the previous CGR the town council submitted proposals (February 2017) – see appendix 1, below- which also requested transfers of land from St Helen Without (Shippon & Abingdon airfield and Abingdon Common) and Sutton Courtenay (land to east of South Town Park/ sewage works). These proposals resulted in objections from the neighbouring parishes and did not proceed.

5.2 The current boundaries are shown on this [map](#).

5.3 It was reported at the last meeting that Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services Manager, Vale of White Horse District Council had e-mailed as follows:

'I am writing to advise you that Vale of White Horse District Council will be undertaking a Community Governance Review (CGR) during 2022 with any agreed changes implemented for the 2023 elections. The purpose of this email is to give you advance warning of what is happening, so that your parish council or parish meeting can start thinking about whether it wishes to seek any changes and submit these for consideration. The council's Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee will undertake the review and make the final decision on any alterations. I have set out below the issues that the review will cover:

- *Altering the existing boundary of a parish.*
- *Creating, merging or abolishing parishes.*
- *Changing the name of existing parishes.*
- *The electoral arrangements for parishes (e.g. how many parish councillors are required and parish warding).*
- *Grouping parishes under a common parish council, or de-grouping parishes.*
- *The "style" of a parish (enabling an area to be known as a town, community neighbourhood or village rather than a parish).*

'For information guidance states that it is good practice for principal councils to undertake CGRs every 10-15 years. This council undertook an extensive district wide review in 2013/14 and a further review of specific areas/issues in 2017/18. The council has agreed to undertake a community governance review every four years with changes agreed for implementation at the next scheduled parish elections – in this case 2023. As with the review in 2017/18, this review is intended to pick up issues raised within parishes since the last review.

'The Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee will meet in early February to consider any requests and agree the terms of reference for the review. I would therefore be grateful if you would submit any requests for matters to be considered with supporting evidence by 21 January 2022. Any parish councils which have submitted matters for review previously are requested to provide confirmation.'

- 5.4 The next CGR will be after the elections due to take place in 2023 so if Members wish to propose changes ahead of that, now is the time to do it.

6. Key information and options

6.1 The previous CGR resulted in the new housing in north/ north-west Abingdon being included within Abingdon.

6.2 The committee is requested to give feedback to the Town Clerk in the relation to the various elements of the review. In italics I give my current thoughts for exercising the delegation:

6.2.2 Altering the existing boundary of a parish. *Members' views are requested.*

6.2.3 Creating, merging or abolishing parishes. *No proposal*

6.2.4 Changing the name of existing parishes. *Since 2012 the parish has been known as Abingdon-on-Thames; previously the town council and the predecessor borough from 1556 was known as Abingdon. Members may wish to consider.*

6.2.5 The electoral arrangements for parishes (e.g. how many parish councillors are required and parish warding). *The size of the council increased from 18 to 21 members in 2003 and subsequently reduced to 19 members in 2021. [Guidance in relation to CGRs](#) states: "When considering the electoral arrangements for a parish, whether it is warded or not, the principal council must also consider any change in the number or distribution of the electors which is likely to occur in the period of five years beginning with the day when the review starts. The most recent electoral register should be used to gain an accurate figure for the existing electorate. Planning assumptions and likely growth within the area, based on planning permissions granted, local plans or, where they are in place, local development frameworks should be used to project an accurate five year electorate forecast. This ensures that the review does not simply reflect a single moment but takes account of expected population movements in the short- to medium -term." *With the increased size of the town do members feel that numbers should be increased – if so the Vale could be requested to look at this. If the council wishes to keep at 19 members I am minded to request the Vale look at the number of members in each ward to ensure that proportionality is maintained.**

6.2.6 Grouping parishes under a common parish council, or de-grouping parishes. *No proposal.*

6.2.7 The “style” of a parish (enabling an area to be known as a town, community neighbourhood or village rather than a parish). *No proposal.*

7. Climate change/green implications

7.1 None.

8. Financial/budget implications

8.1 These would depend on any changes resulting from a CGR. For example a change of boundaries could result in increased council tax base and increased expenditure on maintaining public property.

9. HR implications

9.1 Similar to paragraph 8 above, this would depend on any changes resulting from a CPR.

10. Supporting papers and appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – town council submission in relation to 2017 CGR.

10.2 Other supporting papers included as links within this document.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
14 January 2022

Appendix 1

Town Council submission in relation of previous CGR Letter submitted February 2017

Dear Ms Reed

Request for Community Governance Review of Abingdon-on-Thames – The Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007

At the meeting of the Town Council which took place on 25th January 2017, it was resolved that the Council requests that the District Council undertakes a Community Governance Review of the parish of Abingdon, specifically in relation to:

- i. The boundaries of the parish;
- ii. The warding arrangements;
- iii. The number of parish councillors.

The Town Council understands that Community Governance should:

- Reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area;
- Be effective and convenient and;
- Take into account any other, non-parish, arrangements for the purposes of community representation or community engagement in the area.

The council believes that its proposals, which are set out below would meet the above “Community of Identity” test. The Council’s proposals are as follows:

Proposals in relation to the parish boundary

- i. Boundaries with Radley and Sunningwell.
Areas A and B on the attached map (not included in this appendix) relate to land north of the Abingdon peripheral road (Dunmore Road and Twelve Acre Drive) and south of the A34. These areas are currently in the parishes of Radley and Sunningwell respectively. Both areas are allocated for housing within the 2031 Local Plan (Part 1) and should the housing developments take place as indicated within the Local Plan then the residents in would look to Abingdon. The A34 would be a boundary which would help to define one community from another and with the housing development effectively being a continuation of the parish of Abingdon it would be incongruous for people within these new developments to look to a different parish from those across the road, south of Dunmore Road / Twelve Acre Drive. The arguments for changing the boundaries have already been recognised by the District Council in that the neighbourhood planning areas for both Radley and Sunningwell Parish Councils do not include these areas. **Note: these proposals were accepted and implemented.**
- ii. Boundary with Sutton Courtenay.
The area marked D on the attached map relates to land which is currently within the parish of Sutton Courtenay. It is to the east of the South Town Park and the sewage works and the Council believes that it is logical for this area to be part of the parish of Abingdon. **Note: this proposal was not accepted by the district council and did not**

proceed.

- iii. Boundary with St Helen Without – Abingdon Common.
The area marked C on the attached plan relates to land which is currently within the parish of St Helen Without and comprises Abingdon Common. Abingdon Common is owned by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council and whilst the area covered by the Common does not include any dwellings or residents, it would seem sensible that the Common, owned by the Town Council and with an allotment site which belongs to the Town Council, is within the parish of Abingdon. **Note: this proposal was not accepted by the district council and did not proceed.**
- iv. Boundary with St Helen Without – Shippon and Abingdon Station.
The Town Council request that consideration be given to amending the boundary with St Helen Without so that land which is currently within the parish of St Helen Without, specifically in relation to Shippon and also Abingdon Station (the airfield and Dalton Barracks) is transferred to Abingdon. Housing development along the Faringdon Road and into Shippon straddles the parish boundary between Abingdon and Shippon in St Helen Without, resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours for historic reasons. Many people would not realise that Shippon is not part of Abingdon and that in passing over the A34 they are passing from one parish to another. The Council believes that the residents of Shippon and Dalton Barracks already look to Abingdon for many of their services and are these areas are functionally part of the town. Should housing development take place following the sale by the Ministry of Defence of land at Abingdon Station (Dalton Barracks) any housing in this area would again look towards Abingdon in terms of services and infrastructure. Consequently it is logical to consider amending the boundary and bringing these areas in to Abingdon.

The Town Council realises that any proposals to change the parish boundary between St Helen Without and Abingdon would be controversial. However, the Town Council also believes that a change of the boundary should be seriously considered in order to provide for effective and convenient representation of local residents at parish level. The amendment of the parish boundary as suggested would better reflect the identities and interests of the affected community. **Note: this proposal was not accepted by the district council and did not proceed.**

Warding Arrangements for Abingdon-on-Thames

The Town Council believes that the parish should continue to be warded. Therefore it follows that it follows that if consideration is being given to the alteration of the parish boundaries then the Council should also request that the District Council gives consideration to consideration of revised warding arrangements for the town.

Number of Parish Councillors to serve Abingdon

The Town Council also request that alongside consideration of alteration of the parish boundaries, consideration should also be given to the number of parish councillors to serve the town of Abingdon.

In requesting a Community Governance Review of Abingdon I am aware that the Vale has a programme of such reviews and if you are minded to undertake such a review I would be grateful if you would indicate the likely timescale which from previous communication with Steven Corrigan I understand would be in time for any changes to take effect from the next parish elections in May 2019.

Should the District Council agree to undertake a review, the Town Council may also wish to bring forward further evidence and arguments to support the proposals set out above. I should be grateful if you could confirm that this may be done as part of the review process as we would not necessarily wish the arguments set out above to be the Council's "final word" on these matters.