

12th May 2017

The Electoral Services Team
South Norfolk Council
South Norfolk House
Cygnet Court
Long Stratton
Norwich
NR15 2XE



Dear Sirs

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2017/18

At our most recent Hedenham Parish meeting held on 6th April 2017 the parishioners present discussed at length the current Governance Review and the parish's response to the Council's survey on this important issue. At the end of these discussions, as Chairman, I asked the meeting to vote on the issue and there was unanimous support amongst the 21 parishioners present for retention of the status quo, i.e. governance focussed on an annual parish meeting (with additional meetings if required), managed by an elected Chairperson and Clerk and supported as necessary by a Parish Committee. In order to reinforce this viewpoint, I was asked by those present to write to you in addition to completing the on-line survey, to emphasise the reasons behind the parishioners' strong preference in relation to local governance.

I have attached a hard copy of my on-line survey responses which were prepared in conjunction with a parish working party set up for the purpose. I have also included further thoughts prepared by one of our parishioners which very much echo those of others within the parish, though perhaps somewhat more strongly.

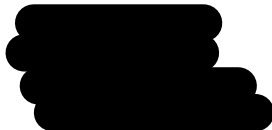
Summarising the principal reasons as to why parishioners support the continuation of the current governance arrangements and in particular why there is opposition to the concept of amalgamating the parish with one or more adjacent parishes for local governance purposes:

- 1 Amalgamation would diminish local representation and almost certainly dilute the focus on local village issues which whilst important to Hedenham would have less importance in the context of an enlarged parish resulting in the village having less ability to manage and control its specific issues and affairs.
- 2 The parish benefits from the capital and income of two Trust funds which can be spent, in accordance with the trust deeds, to the benefit of the parish and local church. These funds have enabled the setting of a zero precept in recent years. Villagers are clearly concerned that any amalgamation might cause these funds to be appropriated to the benefit of others and furthermore that we might be required to share in the precept costs of the adjacent parish(es) with whom we merge.

- 3 The geography and local infrastructure, notably a lack of safe footpaths, create a degree of separation from adjacent parishes whilst creating a strong community ethos within the village. This separation does not naturally lend itself to thoughts of amalgamation with other parishes for governance purposes.
- 4 There is a real sense of a reinvigoration of interest in village life and local issues with the recent election of a new Parish Chairman and Clerk, strong attendance at the recent Parish Meeting and keen support for current local initiatives notably the Hedenham Speedwatch campaign. This bodes well for the maintenance of strong and effective governance without the need for any significant change in the current arrangements. At a time when we are seeing more community engagement here in Hedenham, parishioners consider that any amalgamation would reverse this encouraging trend and act so as to reduce local democracy.

We trust that the Council Governance Review Committee will take due consideration of the views of Hedenham parishioners as expressed in both our survey return and in this correspondence when arriving at their draft and then ultimately published local governance proposals.

Yours faithfully

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Parish Chairman.A black rectangular redaction box covering the name of the Parish Chairman.

Hedenham Parish Chairman

Review of Community Governance Arrangements for Parishes in South Norfolk

1. **Name** David Ledsham
2. **Job title or position** Chairman
3. **Parish** Hedenham
4. **Email address** david.ledsham@bopenworld.com
5. **Does the parish council (or parish meeting) have the capacity to deliver its statutory functions and other services that residents require?**

Yes

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

We have a core group of approximately 30 actively involved parishioners and a new parish Chairman and Clerk both elected in October 2016. Being a small parish there are few services that are needed. We have Trust funds in the village which are able to meet the cost of any needs/requirements as these funds can be applied for the benefit of Hedenham residents as defined in the Trust deed.

6. **Can you solve the problems that your residents bring to you? Does the Parish Council (or parish meeting) discuss important issues that affect the parish and try to take action, or to seek action, to deal with those issues?**

Yes

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

At the most recent parish meeting on 6 April 2017 a wide range of issues impacting parishioners and the parish itself were discussed and an action plan has been developed to seek to ensure that these issues are satisfactorily resolved from the parish's perspective. There exists a wide range of experience within the parish covering the broad range of issues that affect the parish.

The main concern of residents tends to be where planning applications are made which significantly affect the village. Two recent applications which saw the parish meeting take action and respond according to the meeting's wishes were the proposed Bio Digester Plant at Seething and the proposal to extend the chicken sheds in Hedenham. Indeed the parish was represented at the planning meeting which discussed the latter application.

7. **Is the Parish Council (or parish meeting) seen by residents to be offering active community leadership?**

Yes

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

As can be seen by the answer to Q6, when appropriate the parish meeting is able to offer community leadership by taking a lead on issues that residents feel are important and need a voice to reflect their concerns. Indeed, at our April 2017 Parish meeting a working party was set up to formulate the parish's response to the governance review on behalf of the parish as a whole.

8. Does the Parish Council find it difficult to get and retain sufficient Parish Councillors?

No

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

Apart from a recent period of difficulty, the Parish meeting has always been able to retain a Chairman and Clerk. The current Chair and Clerk have committed to represent the parish meeting for at least the next 2 years and the parish already has volunteers for subsequent years when this becomes necessary.

9. Based on the Terms of Reference or other local considerations, is there a case for either increasing or reducing the number of parish councillors?

No

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

As a parish meeting all that is required is a Chair and Clerk. We also have a 4 person Parish Committee, elected/re-elected at each parish meeting, that can be consulted on certain issues if this is warranted.

10. Based on the Terms of Reference or other local considerations, is there a case for dividing the parish into two or more wards, each with its own allocation of parish councillors?

No

If yes, please let us know how you would change the boundary and the reasons for the change and email the map to review@s-norfolk.gov.uk.

11. Based on the Terms of Reference or other local considerations, if you already have wards, are they up-to-date in representing the parish communities.

Yes/No

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

This question is not applicable to our Parish

12. Is there a case for 'grouping' your parish with one or more neighbouring parishes, merging them to create a single new 'joint' parish and parish council?

No

If yes, with which parish would you merge and are there any significant parish-owned assets or employment issues that might be affected by a merger?

The parish is very concerned that any merger with one or more adjacent parishes would significantly dilute the importance of/focus on local Hedenham issues, reduce the strength and effectiveness of local village governance and complicate our currently favourable funding situation (parish trust funds and NIL precept).

13. **If you are already a 'grouped' joint parish as a result of a previous merger of parishes, does the current arrangement work satisfactorily?**

Yes/No

Please explain why you have indicated yes or no:

This question is not applicable for Hedenham

14. **Do your parish boundaries need amending to fit with your community or communities?**

No

If no, are there features such as rivers, railways or less-populated rural roads that might replace some of your current boundaries?

There could potentially be some rationalisation of our parish boundary using rural roads. For Hedenham north around Harvey Lane, south at Earsham Road/Pound Lane and west at the Low Road/B1332 junction.

15. **Would you like to change the 'style' of your parish council – in other words, its name. If you wanted to merge, what would you like to call the new 'grouped' council?**

No

16. **Do you have any other comments or suggestions?**

Hedenham is a small parish with a population of around 160. It has a clear sense of community and through the parish meeting is able to provide efficient and effective local governance. Important local issues for residents are able to be dealt with and there is effective community engagement as witnessed by attendance at parish meetings. The last annual meeting in April 2017 was attended by 21 parishioners some 13% of the parish population. When important issues are raised the parish is able to effectively deal with them e.g. speeding has been an issue for residents in the village and a local Speedwatch team was set up in 2016 which is now one of the top rated teams in Norfolk and has resulted in the imminent procurement of electronic speed signs to be based within the village.

The community governance review was fully discussed at the April 2017 parish meeting and there was unanimous support to retain the status quo. We hope the Committee will take note of and respect the wishes of the local community, as expressed in this survey and in supporting correspondence mailed directly to Committee, by confirming that there will be no change in Hedenham parish's existing governance arrangements.

Potential Grouping of Hedenham Civil Parish

Hedenham Parish contains approximately 160 Parishioners whose Parish Meeting is one of the last vestiges of Direct Democracy in England, all other bodies being Representational. Parishioners are well satisfied their current administrative and representational needs are being met with a direct immediacy no other form of representation is able to offer. Specific committees can be convened at need to examine local matters urgently. Noting the way questions in the SNDC document are presented they are concerned that decisions have already been made as to the fate of the Parish. They fear it another example of their wishes being disregarded, as with recent Planning and Development Policy for the village by SNDC, which they opposed. This engenders disenchantment in Parishes with the democracy available via the SNDC and NCC reflecting in the difficulty in filling Parish Council Posts.

Hedenham is isolated from adjoining parishes by tilled fields with few transport links and no viable foot or cycle ways. It has little infrastructure, merely water, telephone and electricity with no possibility of upgrading or addition, whatever amalgamations are made, because of sheer financial pragmatism, as confirmed by SNDC. We enjoy dark skies, are able to bury our Christian dead and have no requirement for allotments. We frequently resort to informal maintenance measures to correct minor village problems by self help eg maintaining visibility splays, spreading grit. We are bisected by the B1332 which bears bus access to Bungay and Norwich. All other practical and safe travel, for whatever purpose, is by private car. Speed issues have recently been addressed by concerted village action which has won police approval and commendation.

Hedenham has benefit of a Parish Feoffee's Trust Fund of substantial capital and a smaller Village Hall Fund. Each has specific areas of application. These enable the Parish to vote a Nil Precept. While it is noted upon Grouping of Parishes there can be separate rights for appointment of Trustees the fear is, over a period of time, because of minority representation de facto control of such assets would pass from Parish hands; further, duplication of facilities would lead to disposal of the lesser used against Parish wishes.

For Hedenham there is no tangible gain in amalgamation with adjoining parishes. Primarily there is diminishment of democracy. There is only the prospect of being a 'milch cow' for the projects and desires of others with little relevance to Hedenham's community requirements. Amalgamation is purely a sacrifice to Local Authority administrative convenience. We manage our affairs to the satisfaction of our Community, quietly, economically, efficiently, necessitously and less cumbrously than most larger representational bodies

Hedenham Parishioners are free Englishmen: we can't be bought, we won't be sold and refuse to be blatantly abused.