Dear Electoral Review Team

Please see attached Poringland Parish Council's submission for the Community Governance Review, proposing a Community Council arrangement for Poringland and the surrounding parishes.

Regards

Catherine

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COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

PORINGLAND PARISH COUNCIL’S SUBMISSION TO SOUTH NORFOLK COUNCIL’S ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS REVIEW COMMITTEE

1. Executive Summary
1.1 Poringland Parish Council has considered the opportunities arising from the Community Governance Review, and this report sets out a proposal to create a large administrative council, serving a number of parishes, and creating an even spread of costs for all those who enjoy the benefit of the larger conurbation of Poringland.

1.2 The report sets out bold suggestions for change, which may not have been implemented anywhere else, and gives the opportunity for South Norfolk Council to lead the way with a model that could be replicated elsewhere. The report sets out a number of options, highlighting which are preferred and which are agreed by neighbouring parishes, and sets out the reasons for putting these forward and the financial benefits that could be offered.

1.3 This response was formally adopted by Poringland Parish Council at its meeting on 28th June 2017.

2. Introduction
2.1 Poringland Parish Council welcomes this opportunity to reconsider the issue of administrative parish boundaries given the considerable changes which have taken place in the village and surrounding areas since the last review in 2002. In particular, recent new building developments have significantly changed the previous boundary demarcations, meaning that past or current arrangements may no longer be fit for purpose.

2.2 Poringland Parish Council is mindful of the Committee’s invitation for parishes to be bold in their submissions and to recognise that it is necessary to look ahead to the possibility of parishes taking on new responsibilities from South Norfolk or Norfolk County Council in the future.

2.3 This submission has been put together following a period of consultation with local residents and neighbouring parishes.

2.4 Poringland Parish Council has sought to engage all neighbouring parishes in discussions aimed at seeking common ground to putting forward alternative arrangements to the status quo where this is felt to be appropriate. With the exception of Bixley Parish Council, other local parishes have determined that they do not wish to pursue such discussions with Poringland, preferring to make their own submissions directly to the Committee.

2.5 However Poringland has determined that this should not preclude them from putting forward proposals which it is felt will be of overall benefit to the wider community in accordance with the Committee’s Terms of Reference and which do not simply seek to preserve the status quo.

2.6 The proposal put forward by Poringland Parish Council stems from an existing arrangement whereby the councils within the ‘Six Strategic Group’ local cluster regularly come together to discuss common issues. This proposal would formalise the majority of that strategic group into a formal Community Council.
3. **Background and Demographic Information**

3.1 In its early deliberations, Poringland identified that a natural boundary exists with the A47 Southern Bypass to the North, the A140 to the West and the A146 to the East. With a few minor exceptions, there are no settlements which bridge these roads between Swainsthorpe to the West and Thurton to the East. Whilst no clear physical boundary exists to the south, Poringland believes that the open spaces between the current Parishes of Stoke Holy Cross and Poringland, and those further south, make a clear boundary.

3.2 On this basis, a case can be made for all the existing parishes of Poringland, the Framinghams, Stoke Holy Cross, Bixley, and Caistor St Edmund to join together using the boundaries outlined above. This, together with options for smaller administrative areas, is explored later in this report. Poringland Parish Council believes that this is a once in a generation opportunity to put together a Community Council embracing the contiguous settlement broadly encompassing Framingham Earl, Framingham Pigot, Poringland, Bixley, Caistor St Edmund and Stoke Holy Cross.

3.3 This wider settlement area has no natural internal borders other than roads. The considerable distance between Upper and Lower Stoke makes this more problematical given that the Review seeks to pull together clearly defined communities. Framingham Earl and Poringland are essentially one village split only by the B1332. Caistor Lane (and roads adjoinig it) is one road embracing a small part of Poringland and virtually all of Caistor St Edmund. Upper Stoke is directly connected to Poringland and is some considerable distance from Lower Stoke. There is a small distance between Bixley and Poringland made much narrower by the impending Bennett Homes development. Framingham Pigot is an anomaly which is considered separately later in this submission.

3.4 Discussions with neighbouring parishes have indicated concern regarding perceived loss of identity, independence and potentially higher council tax bills should they join with Poringland. To some extent Poringland Parish Council understands these issues but believes they are overstated. Some residents believe that a “merger” with Poringland will impact on their property values (notwithstanding that postal addresses are unaltered) as they see Poringland as somewhat “down market”. On the other hand, it is suggested that younger families are less concerned about such issues and do not recognise these demarcations to the same extent.

3.4 In addition, Poringland itself has most of the main assets including the Community Centre which are enjoyed by all local residents in the wider community. It does not seem unreasonable for the running costs of such assets to be spread across the communities which use them.

3.5 Warding arrangements can be introduced to ensure that appropriate representation on all current parishes is preserved in any new arrangements.

3.6 It is suggested that this outcome would tie in precisely with the Review’s objectives of improved community engagement, more cohesive communities, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services. It also reflects the aim of the new arrangements being tied to firm ground features as all residents are clustered in one close community.

4. **Options for Joint or Merged Arrangements**

4.1 The following options have been put forward, however the Council is open to any mixture of
the below, and is not set on the names, boundaries, or administrative arrangements set out below. These suggestions are set out in no particular order, however the conclusion of this report does set out the priority order of the preferred options.

**Option 1 - Poringland and The Framinghams Community Council**

4.2 Framingham Earl and Poringland are effectively one village divided by the B1332. The High School, serving a much wider area, and the One Stop and Post Office, are in Framingham Earl. The Community Centre, Budgens, the Memorial Playing Field, Cemetery, the Well Pharmacy, the Primary School, several shops, a dentist, optician, garage and both Doctors Surgeries are in Poringland. The Railway Tavern is in Framingham Earl. The Royal Oak and Zaks are in Poringland. But all these facilities are shared by residents of Poringland and Framingham Earl and the wider area. The image below shows the close nature of the boundary, with Poringland on the left of the B1332, and Framingham Earl on the right, until Tulip Tree Drive:

![Map of Poringland and Framingham Earl](image)

4.3 It can be seen that the area is completely conjoined, without even the use of the natural boundary of Long Lane being used to draw the line. The nature of both parishes has changed enormously since the last review, mainly due to the additional house building.

4.4 There is no clear divide between the two parishes in the areas between Long Road and Rectory Lane. St Mary's Road, All Saints Road and St Anne's Road adjoin but are currently in different parishes. In Burgate Lane, one side of the road is in Poringland, the other in Framingham Earl. The same applies for Norwich Road (B1332). No clear boundary between them exists. The images below show just how undefined the boundaries are.
The white house on the left is in Framingham Earl, the lamppost on the right is in Poringland.

The same junction with the white house behind the tree. The grey car is parked in Poringland.

4.5 The "Fiveways" roundabout is effectively shared between the two parishes and recent concerns about the state of the roundabout have required a special sub committee to be set up with a potential for disagreement as to how costs should be borne.

The boundary of the parishes is directly down the middle of this roundabout.

On All Saints Road, the boundary is at the edge of the grass next to the blue car on the left, and at the wall just the other side of the silver car on the left. The property the other side of the house in the foreground on the right pays a different level of council tax to a different authority, despite broadly enjoying the same services.

In Burgate Lane, the red house on the left is in Framingham Earl and the cream house on the right is in Poringland.

4.6 Turning to Framingham Pigot, this is a large area with relatively few houses. Framingham Pigot currently has no Parish Council. It is suggested that in the interest of fairness in paying for facilities, Framingham Pigot should also join the wider Community Council. However,
given that residents there currently pay no precept, it is accepted that this may be unpopular for local residents, and Poringland would not object if South Norfolk felt that the status quo should be preserved. However for the purpose of completeness, Framingham Pigot’s boundaries and features have been explored in this report.

4.7 Bringing Framingham Pigot into the boundaries of the Community Council would address a democratic deficit, in that currently that area is served by a Parish Meeting. By enhancing this to Parish or Community Council, matters such as planning application consultations, provision of services and the myriad of other matters that Parish Councils are responsible for would be undertaken by democratically elected representatives, rather than being overseen by the outdated concept that is Parish Meetings. Framingham Pigot is one of the Parish Meeting areas that represents a larger population than the smallest Parish Councils in South Norfolk.

4.8 The boundaries of Framingham Pigot go over the A146, with a further 6 properties in the area north of the A146 and south of the boundary. It is suggested that the A146 becomes the amended parish boundary, and that the 6 houses become in the administrative area of Kirby Bedon.

4.9 This would bring together Poringland, Framingham Earl and Framingham Pigot into one administrative area, with six properties moving to Kirby Bedon for administrative purposes.

4.10 There is some financial merit in merging these areas into one Community Council. Performing a simple calculation to add the precepts of the three areas together, then divide by the sum total of the tax base (minus the six properties over the A146) results in an indicative Band D precept of £69.57. This is a considerable increase for both Framingham Earl and Framingham Pigot, but a reduction for Poringland. However with so many of the services offered through the Poringland precept being used by residents of the Framinghams, it seems fair to spread the cost across the communities. These services include things like bus shelters, the
Community Centre, play areas, the burial ground, and much more.

4.11 The map below sets out Poringland Parish Council’s proposed boundary map (inside the green line) for a Council called Poringland and The Framinghams Community Council.

**Option 2 – Henstead Community Council**

4.12 This is by far the boldest of the options. This option includes the merging of Poringland, Framingham Earl, and Framingham Pigot as outlined in the section above, and brings in options to merge parts of Stoke Holy Cross, all of Caistor St Edmund, and all of Bixley. The merits of bringing each of these areas together as a Community Council are set out below. It is felt that this forward-thinking step should result in a complete change of name, which should not include any of the existing parish names, and so steering away from preconceptions, suggestions of takeovers, or concerns about which names take precedence. It will give a new identity. The name ‘Henstead’ has been drawn from the County electoral division that covers the area. However Poringland is open to suggestions for appropriate names for a new Council.

**Stoke Holy Cross**

4.13 Stoke Holy Cross is effectively two separate villages with Upper Stoke being joined directly with Poringland, and Lower Stoke being over a mile away across open countryside. The ratio of residents is roughly one third Upper Stoke and two thirds Lower Stoke. This means adding around a further 500 residents to a new combined Community Council leaving the remainder in a stand alone new council for Lower Stoke (where the Village Hall and playing field are situated). The ongoing developments in Lower Stoke would leave a Council of around 1000 residents, enough to be self sufficient or to merge with another nearby parish. However, if South Norfolk Council were minded to do so, Poringland would welcome the inclusion of Lower Stoke in the wider Community Council concept.
4.14 The map above shows that Stoke Holy Cross is a large area, bisected by the A140 to the west, and incorporating Dunston. The area of Upper Stoke, to the east, is conjoined with Poringland, with no discernible boundary. There is no evidence that the local residents here identify any more with Stoke Holy Cross than they do with Poringland.

4.15 It is suggested that the new Community Council should include residents on Brickle Road, Brickle Loke and both sides of Chandler Road. To offer defined boundaries, Chandler Road to Whiteford Hall can be used as the boundary to the north, turning south at the track and then east on Long Lane from Watering Farm. The boundary would then run along the ends of the gardens of the properties on Brickle Road. This would bring Highfield Farm, Valley Farm, Narborough House, all the properties on Chandler Road, and those on Brickle Road into Poringland. The anomaly on Brickle Road would be removed, bringing the parish boundary along the road rather than veering off along a track and back to the road.

In the above picture, the property to the left of Boundary Way is in Poringland. The red property immediately to the right of Boundary Way is in Poringland, while the next red property, and the white cottages, are in Stoke Holy Cross.

In the above image, the hedge between the two red properties forms the parish boundary.
4.16 In terms of finance, taking as a rough rule a third of the Stoke Holy Cross tax base to measure the possible impact on the precept, and using the same calculation as before, the Band D precept for a Community Council which included Poringland, The Framinghams and Upper Stoke would be £65.79. This would represent an increase for all except Poringland. If taking Upper Stoke only, and bringing it into Poringland, while excluding The Framinghams, the comparable Band D would be £78.06.

4.17 The map below sets out the revised parish boundary in the Stoke Road area (east of the green line).

4.18 Caistor currently extends from a boundary close to the new Mulberry Park development at the top of Caistor Lane down to the Roman Settlement on the Stoke / Norwich Road. There is no natural boundary on Caistor Lane between Caistor St Edmunds and Poringland. Under the proposed guidelines it is suggested that Caistor St Edmund has insufficient residents to remain a stand alone parish council. It’s options seem to be to merge with Poringland or Stoke Holy Cross but it is some distance from the latter whilst directly joining the former. The vast majority of residents live in the contiguous area of Caistor Lane and its adjoining roads of South Wood Drive and St Edmunds Close. Poringland Parish Council proposes that Caistor St Edmund should also join the new Community Council.
4.19 The map above shows that Caistor St Edmund is a large area. The majority of the residential settlement immediately adjoins Poringland, and again, there is no evidence to show that these residents identify more with Caistor than with Poringland. The remainder of the community is outlying farms and remote properties. The parish is bisected by the A47 to the north, however it is acknowledged that while this would sit well as a clearly defined boundary, the area to the north of the A47 would not fit well with either Bixley or Keswick & Intwood. It could not be incorporated into the area north of the parish boundary as that falls with Norwich City Council, with the river forming the district border.

4.20 Therefore it is proposed that the area north of the A47 remains within the parish. It is mainly felt that the whole of Caistor would sit well in the larger community council as it is not considered ‘sustainable’ in terms of the number of residents. Moving the boundaries to bring those residents immediately adjacent to Poringland into the parish is not considered to be a sustainable solution, as it would leave Caistor with very few residents to remain sustainable.

The parish boundary sits between 16 and 18 Caistor Lane. In the picture above, it is between the two houses shown, behind the tree and telegraph pole. It is defined by a ditch. The picture above shows a continuous street scene. The yellow bricked house in the foreground is in Poringland, with the red bricked house further on being in Caistor.
4.21 Looking at the finances, again merging the precepts of the proposed parishes, the Band D precept would be £64.07. This represents an increase for all parishes except Poringland. If Poringland was to merge only with Caistor, the Band D precept would be £80.62.

Bixley

4.22 The final parish proposed to be included within the new Community Council is Bixley. This is a small parish covering a large area, extending to the river boundary with Old Lakenham. The main settlement is Arminghall, just north of the parish boundary with Caistor St Edmund.

4.23 At the southern-most boundary, Bixley adjoins Poringland just north of The Ramblers. Planning permission has been given for around 60 new dwellings on the site immediately north of The Ramblers, opposite Octagon Farm. Around a third of these dwellings sit in Poringland, with the remainder in Bixley. It is expected that, as a natural extension of the existing settlement, and with no discernible boundary features, residents in that new development will identify with Poringland rather than the more remote Arminghall.

4.24 Looking at the existing boundaries, again the parish is bisected by the A47, however for the same reasons as Caistor St Edmund, it is not practical for the A47 to form the boundary. However, to the north west the parish is cut by the A146. In a similar manner to the proposals for Framingham Pigot, there could be some merit in moving the 9 properties north of the A146 into Trowse, and having the A146 form the natural boundary.

4.25 In order to ‘round this off’, it would make sense to extend the A146 boundary further south east, bringing the two or three properties currently in Kirby Bedon but south of the A146, into the new Community Council area. Thus, the A146 would form the eastern boundary from the junction with the B1332 / A47 to The Gull Inn, Framingham Pigot. This revised parish boundary is mapped out in Option 3.
4.26 Bixley Parish Council have expressed a wish to merge with another parish council, and the immediate proposal from Poringland would be that this is the larger Community Council. A proposal to merge only Bixley with Poringland is set out in Option 3 later in this report. Poringland would also be open to a suggestion such as Poringland with The Framinghams and Bixley (although this may be a bit lengthy as a name).

4.27 Exploring the financials, adding in Bixley (minus the 9 proposed for Kirby Bedon) to the Community Council would result in a Band D of £64.44. This represents a reduction for Poringland and Bixley.

**Trowse**

4.28 Whilst Trowse has been considered, it is suggested that its location and its distance from Poringland would not make it a natural fit with the proposed new arrangements. Trowse is conjoined with the city of Norwich, and would more naturally identify with that community than the larger area further south. Local anecdotal evidence shows that while Trowse participates in the Strategic Six group, the parish in not so active in community groups derived from the Six, such as the Good Neighbours Scheme. However, the Council acknowledged that Trowse will join with Poringland and The Framinghams to form the new three member district ward from May 2019, and is open to further discussion about the inclusion of Trowse in a wider Community Council.

4.29 The map below sets out the proposed boundaries for the Henstead Community Council.

![Map of Henstead Community Council boundaries](image)

**Option 3 – Poringland with Bixley Parish Council**

4.30 Of the options, while this one offers the least in terms of defined boundaries and conjoined settlements, it is the least contentious. Bixley Parish Council has expressed an interest in
joining, and this option is explored for completeness. It offers cost savings and is welcomed by both councils, should the option of a Community Council be rejected.

4.31 The boundaries of Bixley are set out earlier in this report. It would still be proposed that the A146 forms the natural boundary, and that the 9 or so properties to the north are moved to Kirby Bedon.

4.32 Merging the two councils and using the same calculation as before, the Band D would be £84.45, an increase for Bixley and within pence for Poringland. However, in reality the administration of Bixley could be absorbed into Poringland with no additional cost, therefore dropping the precept of Bixley, and splitting the precept of Poringland between the tax base of Poringland and that of Bixley (minus 9) would result in a Band D of £82.42. However this will be reduced when the Bennett Homes development is built, potentially bringing a further 30 into the tax base, reducing the Band D to £81.01. This represents a decrease for Poringland, and an increase for Bixley.

4.33 The map below sets out the proposed boundaries for a merged Poringland with Bixley Parish Council, based purely on existing boundaries except the A146 as described above.

5. **Demographic Information**

5.1 Any of the above options would result in adjustments to the population within the administrative area, and the tax base.

5.2 Option 1 would result in Poringland and The Framinghams Community Council having responsibility for a population of around 5,190, electorate of approx 4,340 and a tax base of 2,173.

5.3 Option 2 would result in Henstead Community Council having responsibility for a population...
of around 6,132, electorate of approx 5,141 and a tax base of 2,554.

5.4 Option 3 would result in Poringland with Bixley Parish Council having responsibility for a population of around 4,266, electorate of approx 3,570 and a tax base of 1,742.

5.5 Compared to other local towns or large parishes, it can be seen that any of these populations are manageable:

- Hingham Town Council: Population 2,364
- Long Stratton Parish Council: Population 4,500
- Harleston Town Council: Population 5,006
- Hethersett Parish Council: Population 5,814
- Diss Town Council: Population 8,085
- Costessey Town Council: Population 14,400
- Wymondham Town Council: Population 15,711

5.6 The proposed population of the Henstead Community Council sits comfortably between the largest parish council, and the third largest town council, with two town councils in South Norfolk Council with smaller populations.

6. **Proposed Warding Arrangements**

6.1 Warding arrangements should ensure proportional representation for each community, while ensuring that no voice is louder than any other.

6.2 If Option 1 was accepted, it would be proposed that Poringland and The Framinghams Community Council would be made up of 13 councillors:
- Poringland – 80% - 9 councillors
- Framingham Earl – 17% - 3 councillors
- Framingham Pigot – 3% - 1 councillor

6.3 If Option 2 was accepted then it is proposed that the new Community Council would have a total of 15 Councillors.
- Poringland – 67% - 8 councillors
- Framingham Earl – 15% - 2 councillors
- Upper Stoke – 8% - 2 - councillors
- Framingham Pigot – 2.5% - 1 councillor
- Bixley – 2.5% - 1 councillor
- Caistor St Edmund – 5% - 1 councillor

NB: Should Framingham Pigot be excluded then a further representative from Framingham Earl would be proposed bring them up to 3.

6.4 If Option 3 was accepted then it is proposed that the new Parish Council would have a total of 11 councillors:
- Poringland – 96% - 10 councillors
- Bixley – 4% - 1 councillor

7. **General Observations**

7.1 Poringland Parish Council has made significant changes over the past couple of years. It has reduced levels of bureaucracy and become more transparent and open to residents. It has become more strategic in the way it operates. The Council has achieved Foundation Award Status under the Local Council Award Scheme and is working towards achieving the Quality
Award Status, with a view to applying when the electoral mandate requirements have been met.

7.2 Poringland Parish Council already has a full time clerk and a part time assistant clerk, who also manages the Community Centre. Poringland has caretaking staff (1 employed, together with an outsourced arrangement for relief caretaking), an administrator, and a street cleaner. Poringland has numerous contractors looking after existing areas within the parish. Any new Council would need a new governance structure, to administrate the needs of the larger working area. There could, for example, be opportunities to create in-house arrangements for grounds contracts, if the area covered was widened. The reduction in duplicated costs such as senior staff, administration (eg insurance) and other costs would result in financial savings and increased efficiency.

7.3 There is a great deal of sense in creating a larger administrative area. Recent issues with Anglian Water, who are replacing much of the local water supply, have demonstrated that problems impact on residents across existing parishes. If The Street and Norwich Road are dug up, it affects residents on one side of the road in Framingham Earl and Poringland on the other. This is just one example of many, demonstrating why it would be preferable to create a new Community Council for the wider area of Poringland, The Framinghams, Caistor St Edmund, Upper Stoke and Bixley.

8. **Conclusion**

8.1 In many ways PPC does not seek change. It recognises however that change is inevitable and puts forward these proposals in a positive manner believing that the proposed outcome is in the best interest of all local residents.

8.2 **Poringland Parish Council wishes to put forward Option 2 – Henstead Community Council – as their preferred option** for governance in the area. The Council believes that the outcome will:

- Provide all local residents with an input into the facilities that they use
- Allow funds to be used across the whole Community Council
- Provide economies of scale and reduced costs
- Simplify administration on issues which affect all residents
- Provide more consultative “muscle” as a joint body on local issues in a manner which the existing Six Strategic Group cannot achieve.

8.3 If Option 2 was rejected, **Poringland Parish Council would wish to promote Option 1**, as this is the minimum that would be required to address the issue of boundaries. Residents have very little concept of administrative boundaries, and are confused when the Clerk to Poringland Parish Council says that they need to call Framingham Earl Parish Council, especially when they live literally yards from the boundary. This is especially the case in Norwich Road and All Saints Road. Poringland Parish Council recognises that Bixley Parish Council wishes to join with a larger administrative area, and would be happy for Bixley to be included in Option 1.

8.4 If neither of the above options are accepted, **Poringland would be willing to accept Option 3** to merge with Bixley Parish Council and create an administrative area covering both parishes.