

**From:** Bixley Parish Clerk <bixleyparishclerk@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** 24 October 2017 16:53  
**To:** Review  
**Subject:** Community Governance Review  
**Attachments:** CGR Phase 2 Response .pdf

Electoral Review Team

Please find attached Bixley Parish Council's comments in response to the second phase of the Community Governance Review

Best wishes

*Tina Eagle*

**Clerk for Bixley Parish Council**

Tel: 01508 494569 / 07980 412027

[Visit Bixley Parish Council Website here](#)

## **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW BIXLEY PARISH COUNCIL**

In consideration of the proposals set out by the Community Governance Review, Bixley Parish Council are agreed that there are two issues which they should respond to:

### **Issue A. Future Structure of the Council**

Bixley Parish Council are disappointed that the Review has not taken on board their comments as put forward in the initial stages of the review. Our submission was based upon the information presented by South Norfolk Council in January, which led us to believe that the review would be looking to establish parish councils of about 1000 parishioners, with the aims of resolving councillor vacancies and shortage of clerks, whilst combining precepts and providing capacity to take on devolved services from the district council, and improving democracy by having more contested elections. Looking at the outcome of the review, these aims have not been met.

The key point that we took from the presentation was that Bixley did not meet the criteria for the new parish councils and would be a target for modernisation. It was already the view of the Parish Council that it was not sustainable in its current form, and that merging with a grouping of parishes to form a community council would be the best option for the long-term.

We felt that this would have the advantage of greater resources both in terms of staff and councillors, as well as the finances available from the combined precepts. It was appreciated that we would be joining a much larger organisation and our representation would likely to be limited to one councillor.

The Review have not accepted this idea and have instead proposed that Bixley merge with Caistor St Edmund Parish Council. It is not an understatement to say that in comparing the presentation with the outcome, we feel that we have been misled.

We accept, however, that both Bixley and Caistor St Edmund are in similar geographical positions (between the urban areas of Norwich and Poringland), are of a similar rural nature, and have similar issues arising from the nature of small villages and low population, rural communities. In this context, we understand the reason for the proposed change. Our main concern would be to ensure that the Parish continued to be represented in a manner which best reflected the interests of its parishioners and which preserved the identity of the parish. It has been noted that the only two public comments made were in support of such a proposal.

### **Issue B. Parish Boundary change**

It has been proposed that the boundary move Northwards towards Arminghall, roughly in line with the southern boundary of Bixley Bottom plantation and the area of the Milestones housing development. This would mean that Octagon Barn, Octagon Farm and Milestones would become part of Framingham Earl and Poringland parishes.

Under this proposal, Bixley Parish Council will lose revenue from the Council Tax from these properties, which will have a significant impact on its precept and its ability to undertake projects on behalf of the community.

In addition, when we investigated the issues involved in a boundary change, we were advised that the Community Charge and the District Councillors may change, but more importantly that the residents affected would have to notify their change of address. We consider that this would be an onerous and unwarranted burden to justify the movement of an administrative boundary. On that basis, we object to the proposed boundary change.

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Brian Grundy <briangrundy1@sky.com>  
**Sent:** 25 October 2017 08:09  
**To:** Julia Tovee  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Community Governance Review - Second phase of consultation closes on 27 Oct 2017.  
**Attachments:** Response - 2nd Phase Consultation Final.docx  
**Importance:** High

Attached is our response the second phase of consultation.

Regards

Brian Grundy  
Vice Chairman Caistor St Edmund Parish Council

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**From:** Julia Tovee <[JTovee@S-NORFOLK.GOV.UK](mailto:JTovee@S-NORFOLK.GOV.UK)>  
**Sent:** 05 October 2017 14:57  
**To:** Dickleburgh and Rushall Parish Council; Tivetshall St Margaret with Tivetshall St Mary Parish Council; Burston and Shimpling Parish Council; Cringleford Parish Council; Keswick Parish Council; Denton Parish Council; Bixley Parish Council; Caistor St Edmund Parish Council; Ashby St Mary Parish Council; Thurton Parish Council  
**Subject:** Community Governance Review - Second phase of consultation closes on 27 Oct 2017.

Good Afternoon

As you will be aware, South Norfolk Council are currently undertaking a Community Governance Review across the district. Following the first phase of consultation, recommendations of Parish Councils and parish boundary changes have now been published. These can be viewed on [our website](#).

With just over 3 weeks to go to the end of the second phase of consultation whereby residents, Community Groups and Parish Councils are welcomed to submit comments on these recommendations. We do not appear to have any comments from your Parish Council/meeting and would like to hear your views. Please note consultation period will be open until 27 October 2017.

Submissions can be made following this link <http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Parish/>

Alternatively submissions can be made in response to this email or in writing to: Electoral Services Department, South Norfolk Council, Cygent Court, Long Stratton, NR15 2XE.

As always if you have any queries please feel free to contact us.

Many thanks,

Electoral Services Team  
t 01508 5336769 e [review@s-norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:review@s-norfolk.gov.uk) [www.south-norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.south-norfolk.gov.uk)



**CAISTOR ST EDMUND PARISH COUNCIL**  
**RESPONSE TO SECOND PHASE OF CONSULTATION**  
**COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**  
**(PARISH BOUNDARY REVIEW)**

**1. Our Opening Position**

1.1 Some 3 or 4 years ago, we were approached by Bixley PC to consider merging our two PCs because they were having difficulty recruiting councillors. We were not persuaded to do so at that time, but at the outset of this process we inclined to the view that there might be a case for grouping the two. However Bixley PC felt that, although there were arguments for such a course, their best strategy was to seek to group with Poringland. Consequently we abandoned the idea and felt justified in recommending to maintain our existing PC arrangements.

**2. Residents' Views**

2.1 In the first phase of consultation, 9 Caistor residents responded to the online South Norfolk Council survey. Almost all were satisfied with the current arrangements, but 3 also felt that a merger with Bixley PC might be appropriate. One of those was also strongly opposed to being "swallowed up by Poringland".

2.2 Both Bixley residents who responded would like to see Caistor and Bixley merge.

2.3 Perhaps surprisingly for its size, there were only 2 responses from Poringland residents, both opting for merging with surrounding councils.

2.4 Following the proposals agreed at the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee on 15 August, we have canvassed the views of 49 of our residents - some 21% of the total of 236 registered electors at December 2016. All identified strongly with the village, and the overwhelming majority were happy with, and would prefer Caistor PC to remain a separate entity. However, many saw the merit in grouping with Bixley because of the similarity of the parishes, but there was no support, and even some hostility, to the idea of merging with Poringland and others to form a larger community council.

**3. The Poringland Dynamic**

3.1 Prior to it being published on the SNC website, we had not been aware of Poringland PCs proposals of 4<sup>th</sup> July for a merger with Caistor (their Option 2 para 4.1.8 et seq). We do have issues with a number of the points which Poringland make in support of their case for merging with Caistor. These are set out in the attached Annex.

3.2 Poringland is a good neighbour, and we have a good relationship with the PC, and many Caistor residents will have friends there. Though not currently proposed by the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee, in the light of Framingham Earl's experience, we feel we need to be unequivocal that at this stage we see no justification in merging with Poringland and others to create a larger community council.

#### **4. Our Current View**

4.1 In our response to the first stage of consultation we set out fully the reasons which we believe justify the existing PC arrangements continuing. They are still extant, and in summary are:

- We have consistently met our statutory obligations and are disciplined and well regulated;
- We have reflected the views and concerns of residents;
- All councillors live within the village and are alert to emerging concerns and issues by day to day contact with parishioner neighbours;
- We have a healthy mix of experienced and new councillors, vacancies are usually filled quickly, and all regular meetings are over quorate;
- In recent years we have led a number of initiatives to improve or maintain the village amenities and fabric;
- The historic PC boundaries cause no discernible issues, are well documented, and are generally well known and identifiable.

4.2 We believe that the view we took then, and which we still hold, is justified by the response of residents to both the SNC survey and our own canvassing.

4.3 We don't see the justification in determining the viability of a parish council simply by the number of electors in the parish. If the council is functioning as it should, and is properly representing its residents, it is obviously not moribund. We believe we can justifiably claim to be a properly performing, effective and viable council!

4.4 Notwithstanding the above, we can see the merits in merging with Bixley as proposed by the Electoral Arrangements Review Committee, and would not be averse to a merger if Bixley were like minded. Such an arrangement should provide sufficient future proofing to maintain the viability of the combined PC for some time to come.

4.5 We are though, strongly of the view that a merger should only go ahead if Bixley PC are properly committed to it.

## ANNEX

### OBSERVATIONS ON POINTS MADE IN PORINGLAND PCs PROPOSAL OF 4 JULY

#### General points in the Poringland submission

1. *“Ceate an even spead of costs for all those who enjoy the benefit of the larger conurbation of Poringland” (Para 1.1)*

*“Poringland 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” (Para 3.4).*

We don't accept the main tenet of this argument, which implies that residents of surrounding parishes are not paying their way. Clearly Poringland do have more general facilities than surrounding parishes (most are commercial businesses) and they are available to all residents in the wider community. But that's not the same as them being enjoyed by all residents! It's more than likely that most residents of Caistor will use the facilities in Norwich more than Poringland. But is that a justification for our residents to pay a council tax surcharge to Norwich?

With regard to the Community Centre, our understanding is that it is being operated as a fee-generating facility, and in the main those using it (irrespective of which parish they live in) do so on a fee-paying basis.

Further, we feel that to undertake a merger of parishes where one of the main stated aims is to increase council tax for residents of smaller parishes to the benefit of those of the larger parish, is not an appropriate starting point.

2. *“....it is necessary to look ahead to the possibility of parishes taking on new responsibilities from SNC or NCC in the future” (Para 2.2).*

In none of the presentations, nor in anything we can find on the SNC website, is there any suggestion that this is proposed or is likely. Though no one knows what the future might hold, we do not feel that a major restructure should be made on the basis of an unknown future.

3. *“Poringland PC believes that this is a once in a generation opportunity to put together a Community Council” (Para 3.2).*

We wonder whether that is indeed the case. The next cyclical review will be 10 or 15 years down the line, but if in the meantime situations change and, through the forum of the 6+ Strategic Group parishes agree to mergers, wouldn't that be possible at any time?

4. *“.....it is suggested that younger families are less concerned about such issues (perceived loss of identity etc)” (Para 3.4).*



Most residents have lived in Caistor for a number of years and the demographic is definitely towards the senior end of the spectrum. There are of course younger families, but probably because we don't have any quantity of new housing or housing estates, their views might not be typical of similar families in other parishes. One young family man has remarked "I personally identify more with Caistor on the basis that I bloody well chose to live there!".

5. *"Warding arrangements can be introduced to ensure that appropriate representation on all current parishes is preserved" (Para 3.5).*

The proposed Option 2 model would give Caistor one councillor – an "appropriate representation" in mathematical terms, but not likely in our view to be in tune with residents in the same way that seven councillors living locally are (particularly if the ward councillor lived outside the village).

### **Caistor specific points in the Poringland submission**

6. *"There is no natural boundary on Caistor Lane between Caistor and Poringland" (Para 4.18).*

The same is true of many parish, town, district and county boundaries up and down the country. There is a large roadside Caistor village sign on the verge which clearly marks the parish boundary.

7. *"...it is suggested that Caistor has insufficient residents to remain a standalone parish council" (Para 4.18).*

We don't see the justification in determining the viability of a parish council simply by the number of electors in the parish. If the council is functioning properly, and is properly representing its residents, it is obviously not moribund and can justifiably expect to continue.

8. *"...the vast majority of residents live in the contiguous area of Caistor Lane" (Para 4.18).*

But 44% of residents live beyond that contiguous area.

9. *"...there is no evidence to show that these residents (along Caistor Lane) identify more with Caistor than with Poringland" (Para 4.19).*

The evidence we have is that most residents do identify strongly with Caistor.

10. *"...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" (Para 4.21).*

The current Band D council tax charge for Caistor is £32.65. We could not support a doubling or near tripling of the parish component for our residents.