



30<sup>th</sup> June 2017

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

Dear Sirs

**Review of Community Governance arrangements within South Norfolk – Submission from Tivetshall Parish Council in response to Consultation**

Whilst it is acknowledged that occasional reviews are necessary, it is clear that rural communities are not subject to any great degree of change, and do not provide scope for significant changes in governance, unless it can be shown that the current system is failing in some way.

South Norfolk Council (SNC) have presented, presumably based on government advice, that parishes are expected to have “strong, clearly defined boundaries, tied to firm ground features”. In the case of Tivetshall St Margaret and Tivetshall St Mary (the Tivetshalls), it is acknowledged that there are properties that lie outside defining features such as the A140 and railway line, but the vagaries of these boundaries reflect the history of the parishes, and there is no desire for change either to the border or the governance of the Tivetshalls.

The proposal by SNC to merge neighbouring parishes is also considered unnecessary. Tivetshall has its own community; the recently-formed Families and Friends group (TFAF) is run by Tivetshall residents, and holds its events in the Tivetshalls, but these are also attended by residents of neighbouring villages. Gissing also has its own community centred around its public house and its new community centre, and other neighbouring parishes of Burston, Dickleburgh, Great Moulton, and the Pulhams all have their own facilities, organisations and identities. These communities are not isolated or insular but they each focus on their own. There is no desire for change from any of these local communities, and none is warranted.

However, there is liaison and co-operation on issues of joint interest. One example of this is the need to improve internet services which has led to involvement of B4RN (Broadband for Rural Norfolk). Residents of Tivetshall have been instrumental in promoting this community project in South Norfolk. Local engagement is what makes this work, and it cannot be matched by more remote authorities.

It has also been suggested that there is a democratic deficit evidenced by the few elections that take place for parish councillors, and that the lack of people putting themselves forward for election somehow represents a failure of democracy. Following discussions with councillors from neighbouring parishes, few would be prepared to volunteer their time to serve in an expanded parish, let alone stand for election. The fact that there are few elections reflects more on the people, and the ways in which they react to circumstance, rather than the governance arrangements.

As well as requiring community governance to reflect community interests, government guidance also says that governance must be "effective and convenient". Whether or not the governance of some communities is ever effective may be a matter of opinion, but it is unlikely that a combined authority covering several parishes could be as effective, flexible and responsive as a smaller one dedicated to a single parish, or pair of parishes in the case of the Tivetshalls. It could also never be as convenient as the current arrangements; parish councillors, even if few in number, know their local community and meet at times when parishioners can attend. Larger, more remote, authorities could not do that and could never be that convenient.

That said, the parishes of Tivetshall St Margaret and Tivetshall St Mary would like to use this opportunity to formalise the current arrangements. Currently the electorate in each parish number less than 900 and therefore both are entitled to 7 councillors, but for many years the parishes of Tivetshall St Mary and Tivetshall St Margaret have had a joint parish council. At the last Parish Council elections in 2015 only three councillors were appointed (one from St Margaret, two from St Mary). In the period since, additional councillors have been co-opted. The current balance of councillors is two from St Margaret and four from St Mary.

The joint parish council own the freehold to the Tivetshall Village Hall, and the leasehold on the adjoining playing field. Tivetshall Primary School is on the St Mary's side of the boundary separating the two parishes, but is the only school serving both communities. The post office is also on the St Mary's side. Prior to WW2 there were two parish churches; St Mary's is now a derelict ruin and St Margaret's is the current active place of worship, serving both parishes. The greatest density of properties is in Mill Lane, The Street and School Road, and the boundary between the two parishes runs along the centre of these three carriageways. Consequently, many of the residents of each parish actually live on opposite sides of the same three roads.

For all the above reasons we believe it would make sense to formally merge the two parishes under the unified identity of "Tivetshall" or "The Tivetshalls", as already reflected on local signage. Residents could still choose to suffix their address with the relevant St Margaret or St Mary if they wish, or simply refer to Tivetshall. The combined electorate of both parishes would still be less than 900 and, as a consequence, can be served by up to 7 councillors as per the current arrangement.

Your Sincerely

  
Parish Clerk, on behalf of Tivetshall Parish Council:

  
  
  
