

CGR 9

Parishes Affected

Didcot, Long Wittenham, East Hagbourne, West Hagbourne

Matter to be considered

Amending the boundary of Didcot parish to incorporate that part of the Millbrook estate that is currently in East Hagbourne parish and parcels of land allocated for housing in Long Wittenham and West Hagbourne parishes

Impact on district and county council boundaries

Affects Didcot North East and Cholsey district wards

Summary of parish council responses

Didcot town council put this proposal forward. It argued that the changes would enable it to, “provide services and representation to residents and to form a cohesive community in the future”.

East Hagbourne parish council opposes the proposal in respect of the Millbrook estate. It has commissioned market research of those residents living in the East Hagbourne part of the estate. The overwhelming majority of those that responded opposed the change. It has submitted a lengthy response, the key part of which is its analysis of the proposal against the assessment criteria, as follows:

“Natural or man-made boundaries that help to define clearly one community from another

The boundary between Didcot and East Hagbourne is long standing and people who live within East Hagbourne clearly feel part of it.

Housing developments that straddle parish boundaries, thereby resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours

Housing development has indeed progressed without regard for the parish boundary, so that the boundary does not follow the existing roads. However, while many people in the survey commented on their affinity with other parts of East Hagbourne, no-one commented on affinity with neighbours in adjoining parts of Didcot

Effective and convenient representation of local residents at parish level

As noted above, 61% of survey respondents said they valued being represented by a volunteer Parish Council with minimal administrative overheads indicating that they feel better represented as part of a small parish than as part of a larger town

The LGBCE's proposals for the warding of South Oxfordshire for the purposes of district council elections and the newly created county council electoral divisions

At higher levels of government we recognise and expect that representatives must cover a wider area than at parish level. This is appropriate, because the questions addressed at higher levels have more regional impact. In the discussions at District level it has been recognised that town and country both have valid but different interests, and that there is merit in joining village to village rather than village to town. However, at the local level it is important that people feel identity with the parish that represents them. East Hagbourne Parish Council has good relations with our representatives at both District and County level and is well able to represent the views of Millbrook residents in wider discussions and residents have given a clear signal that they wish to remain part of East Hagbourne parish.

Views expressed in relation to any changes, particularly from those people directly affected & the extent to which proposals reflect the identities and interests of the affected community

The people of Millbrook have expressed their views clearly and powerfully through the survey - they wish to remain part of East Hagbourne parish"

West Hagbourne parish council supports the general principle of moving land that will ultimately form part of the Great Western Park estate into Didcot parish but proposes that the boundary be drawn along the southern edge of the housing development, rather than the southern edge of the application site. This would mean that the buffer zone would remain in West Hagbourne parish. It states that,

"the maintenance of open space between the rural Parish of West Hagbourne and the urban Town Council of Didcot is of huge importance to the residents of West Hagbourne. The Parish Council there for feel that the protection of this open space could better achieved by it remaining within West Hagbourne".

Long Wittenham parish council has written in respect of land to the north-east of the town. It states, "in the long term, we appreciate that Didcot Town Council will be better placed to provide residents of this community with local services on a scale that Long Wittenham will struggle to deliver." It argues, however, that now is not the time as a boundary change would exclude it from any formal role in commenting on a planning application for the site, which will have many implications for the parish and the village of Long Wittenham in particular. Much of its response sets out concerns relating to the development rather than responding directly to the boundary change proposal.

Summary of other responses

East Hagbourne parish council has provided a market research survey of Millbrook residents with its submission, which indicates that the overwhelming number of those who responded would prefer to remain in East Hagbourne parish. If council supports the working group recommendation we will consult all residents of Millbrook as part of the next stage of the review.

Recommendation

To amend the boundary of Didcot parish in line with the request from Didcot Town Council, as shown on the attached map.

Justification

These are a contentious set of proposals, particularly those relating to Millbrook and are best dealt with individually.

The land that is currently in Long Wittenham parish forms part of the allocated North East Didcot housing site (the southern part of the site is already in Didcot parish). This site is for around 2000 houses and will form a strategic extension to the town. The houses will sit across the perimeter road from the Ladygrove estate and will look to Didcot. Long Wittenham village is over a mile away from the northern edge of the site and the working group considers that the identities and interests of future residents, as well as effective and convenient local government, are best served by moving this land into Didcot parish. If the boundary remains unchanged then, in due course, the development will straddle a parish boundary resulting in people being in a different parish from their neighbours.

The same principle applies to the land in West Hagbourne parish that will form part of the Great Western Park development in due course. Regarding the buffer zone, the working group considers that effective and convenient local government is likely to be best achieved by including all land, including open space requiring ongoing maintenance, in a single parish. It does not therefore support the proposal put forward by West Hagbourne parish council.

The Millbrook estate, in East Hagbourne parish, forms an extension to the Fleet Meadow estate, in Didcot parish. Millbrook was built slightly later but the housing designs are much the same and, to the outside observer, it appears to be a single development. Fleet Meadow Community Hall, in Didcot parish, sits at the end of Sandringham Road, the main entrance to Millbrook. There are about 930 properties on Fleet Meadow in Didcot parish and 360 on Millbrook in East Hagbourne parish.

This boundary has been subject to much discussion over the years and was included in the last review of parish arrangements undertaken by the council back in 2000. At that time the recommendation (previously decisions rested with the Secretary of State) was simply to make minor adjustments to provide a clearer boundary between the two parishes.

After careful consideration the working group recommends including the whole of the Millbrook estate in Didcot parish, although it is aware that the people directly affected are unlikely to support this when they are formally consulted.

In coming to its recommendation, the working group is mindful that the current boundary divides a housing development, thereby resulting in people being in a different parish from their neighbours; that the outer edge of the Millbrook estate provides a strong man-made boundary; and that effective and convenient representation of local residents is best achieved by them all being in the same parish, as evidenced by the Local Government Boundary Commission's decision to place whole estate in the new Didcot North East district ward.