

East Hagbourne Parish Council

Mr David Buckle
Chief Executive,
South Oxfordshire District Council
Benson Lane,
Crowmarsh Gifford,
Wallingford, OX14 8HQ

Dear David,

Community Governance Review

Further to your letter of 19th December, I enclose the submission of East Hagbourne Parish Council with regard to the future representation of that part of Millbrook lying within East Hagbourne Parish, which subject forms part of the Community Governance Review. This letter forms an integral part of our submission.

The review sets out several criteria and we have addressed each of these in our submission, however we firmly believe that the views of those residents directly affected should be paramount. For that reason we commissioned during the summer a professional and comprehensive survey of those 316 households lying in the East Hagbourne part of Millbrook. The survey showed an overwhelming desire among residents to remain part of East Hagbourne parish and we strongly believe their views, as clearly expressed in the survey, should be respected. A copy of the survey has already been sent to you and it is enclosed again here as an integral part of our submission.

We fully understand the needs of Didcot, as a rapidly growing town, to clarify its future boundaries, however the future of Millbrook should be considered independently of the proposals to transfer land from West Hagbourne and Long Wittenham parishes. In the latter two cases, the land is earmarked for future housing development and there is no extensive existing resident population. Millbrook, in contrast is an established community with strong ties to East Hagbourne parish. The residents have said very clearly that they wish to remain part of East Hagbourne and we believe those wishes should be respected.

We have already exchanged emails about the process whereby a decision seems to have already been reached by the Working Group. The Terms of Reference clearly state that the initial consultation closes on 31 January 2014 and draft proposals will be agreed by Council on 20 February. It is therefore anomalous that the Working Group has already declared its position, particularly since two of the six members are Didcot Town Councillors and therefore have a direct interest in the outcome. I trust that the full Council will be able to take a more balanced view fully respecting the wishes of Millbrook residents.

Yours sincerely,



David J Rickeard
Chairman, East Hagbourne Parish Council
Farthings, Blewbury Road
East Hagbourne, Didcot
Oxfordshire OX11 9LF
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1235 813 373
email: david@rickeard.org.uk

Copies to : EHPC Clerk & Councillors, SODC Councillors

East Hagbourne Parish Council

This is the response of East Hagbourne Parish Council to the Community Governance Review being carried out by South Oxfordshire District Council and should be read in conjunction with the covering letter.

Our response covers two of the proposals for consideration:

1. Didcot, (East Hagbourne, Long Wittenham, West Hagbourne)
 - Amending the boundary of the 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
2. East Hagbourne
 - Creating a single ward parish

1. Millbrook should remain part of East Hagbourne parish

Didcot Town Council has asked that the part of Millbrook situated within East Hagbourne parish be transferred to Didcot along with the land for proposed developments to the north and the west of the town. We make no comment on the land for new developments, except to note that a distinction should be drawn between those new development areas which are not yet occupied, and Millbrook, where there is an established resident population whose views should be paramount in the Review.

The Fleet Meadow/Millbrook housing development lies partly in Didcot parish and partly within East Hagbourne. The streets lying within the boundaries of East Hagbourne are

To the north of Sandringham Road:

- Stonesfield 41 properties
- Pebble Drive 63 properties

To the south of Sandringham Road:

- Saxons Way 37 properties
- Cromwell Drive 28 properties
- Viking Drive 19 properties
- St Hilda's Close 55 properties
- St Anne's Court 21 properties
- St Hughs Rise 52 properties

Earlier in the year, Didcot Town Council carried out a rather rudimentary survey of the whole of Didcot, asking residents for their views on the proposed boundary changes.

Because the issue had been raised well in advance of the Community Governance Review, East Hagbourne Parish Council decided that action should be taken without waiting for the review to start. Council decided that while they would welcome input from anyone in the parish, the views of those residents directly affected were of primary importance and should be central to our response to the review.

During July/August 2013 we commissioned Research Insight, an independent market research consultancy, to conduct a comprehensive and independent survey of the views of each household in Millbrook. The survey was carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society. Fieldwork was conducted mainly by Research Insight staff, with some assistance from local residents.

Importantly, the survey was conducted in such a way that all responses were non-attributable, with responses linked to specific addresses via a unique random number known only to Research Insight. In this way, respondent confidentiality was maintained and we could be sure that only one response could be recorded from each participating household.

Each of the 316 households in Millbrook was visited by Research Insight during evenings and weekends, and invited to complete a short 1-page survey (one per household). If nobody was in, the questionnaire was put through the letterbox. Provision was made for completed questionnaires to be returned to the East Hagbourne Village Shop, one of three local addresses in Millbrook or on-line. Repeat visits were made to all households to maximise participation in the survey.

The full survey report forms a part of this response and contains full details of all the individual household responses. It has already been publicised through the East Hagbourne web site with a copy sent to SODC in September 2013. The main findings from the survey are summarised here:

Summary of Millbrook Survey

A total of 98 completed surveys was returned, representing 31% of the households in Millbrook, with responses in some streets over 50%. This is a large return for such a survey, indicating the high level of interest among residents and also indicating that the results provide a reliable indication of residents' views. Martin Hollis of Research Insight estimates that even if all 316 households had replied to the survey it is unlikely that the results would have been different by more than 5%.

Of the 98 total responses 93% (89 households) said they wanted to stay part of East Hagbourne, with only 5 wishing to transfer to Didcot and 4 households expressing no strong view. This is an overwhelming signal from Millbrook residents that they value being part of East Hagbourne parish and want to remain part of it.

- 87% said it gave a more pleasant village-like atmosphere
- 82% valued being part of a more local community
- 74% felt it was more neighbourly than other areas of Didcot
- 65% valued having an address within a rural parish
- 61% valued being represented by a volunteer Parish Council with minimal administrative overheads.
- 25% had family ties with East Hagbourne

These views were reinforced by a number of additional comments, including appreciation of the footpath network and some strong views from families who had long-standing ties with the village or St Andrew's Church.

The level of engagement with the survey is also indicated by the fact that 88 households provided additional written comments. These reinforce the views that people appreciate being part of East Hagbourne and in some cases chose Millbrook to live specifically because it is part of a village parish. When asked what advantage there would be for them to become part of Didcot parish, the vast majority of people could see no advantage.

Respondents were also asked which facilities in East Hagbourne they regularly used. 95% of all respondents said they used the footpaths within the parish and 70% used the Fleur-de-Lys pub and the Community Shop and Post Office. 60% participated in parish and village events and over half use the two children's playgrounds in the parish. There is therefore strong evidence that many Millbrook people are actively engaged within the wider parish.

It is clear that transfer of Millbrook to Didcot parish would give no benefit to Millbrook residents and would risk breaking the strong ties that many people have with the wider East Hagbourne parish. A large number of residents - 93% of those responding - are strongly against a move.

The Assessment criteria

The factors that the council will take into account in making decisions are 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.

2. The whole of East Hagbourne should be represented as a Parish Council ward.

East Hagbourne Parish Council has 9 members representing the 1486 people on the electoral roll. Currently, East Hagbourne Parish is divided into two wards with six councillors representing the 'East Hagbourne' ward and three representing the 'Millbrook' ward. East Hagbourne Parish Council believes that the number of councillors should remain unchanged, but that the provision for warding should be removed.

In practice, Council considers topics of relevance to all people within the parish and councillors feel a responsibility to all residents, not just those in the ward where they were nominated or elected.

As in many parishes, finding people willing to volunteer for Parish Council duties is not always easy. At the last election in 2009, there were 10 candidates for the 9 available seats. As a result there was an election in the East Hagbourne ward, but none in the Millbrook ward. Democracy would have been better served if the parish had been considered one ward, so that all electors within the parish had been able to express their choice.

As part of the Millbrook survey we asked people if they would support becoming part of a broader single ward within East Hagbourne. The general views of residents that they wish to remain part of East Hagbourne rather than become part of Didcot parish were very clearly expressed. On this more technical question of how Millbrook should be represented within East Hagbourne Parish Council, 64 households agreed with the proposal for a single ward, 6 disagreed and 27 households had no strong views. There is therefore support for the proposal to make Millbrook part of a broader East Hagbourne ward.

Electing representatives to the Parish Council through a single ward would help all people in East Hagbourne feel part of the overall community, better reflect the current situation where councillors act for all residents and reflect the wishes of Millbrook residents.
