

PETERSFIELD TOWN COUNCIL

An extra-ordinary meeting of the Petersfield Town Council was held at the Town Hall, Petersfield on 31 October 2011.

PRESENT: Cllr G Watkinson (Town Mayor), Cllr R Ayer, Cllr G Budden, Cllr V Clarke, Cllr Ms J Dickinson, Cllr Mrs L Farrow, Cllr Mrs S Harwood, Cllr P Marshall, Cllr C Mills, Cllr W Organ and Cllr Ms M Vincent.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Mr N Hitch (Town Clerk), Mrs S McMorran (Deputy Town Clerk), Cllr Mrs H Ayer (EHDC) and 10 members of the public.

C 0330 TOWN MAYORS REMARKS

The Town Mayor welcomed those present and thanked them for attending. He then outlined the format of the meeting.

C 0331 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Mrs S Farrow.

C 0332 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Clarke declared a personal non prejudicial interest as he lived in the proposed new Parish of Sheet.

Cllr Ms Dickinson declared a personal non prejudicial interest as she lived in the proposed new Parish of Sheet.

Cllr Mills declared a personal non prejudicial interest as he lived in the proposed new Parish of Sheet.

Cllr Ayer declared a personal non prejudicial interest as he lived in Petersfield.

Cllr Organ declared a personal non prejudicial interest as he lived in the proposed new Parish of Sheet.

C 0333 APPROVAL OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Petersfield Town Council held on 3 October 2011 be approved.

C 0334 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Clive Shore addressed the meeting on behalf of Sheet Village Association (SVA).

He urged the Town Council to consider some key points:

- The desire for a Sheet Parish Council was not new and was not the result of the efforts of a few isolated ideologues. SVA had roots back to 1973 and first wrote to East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) regarding the re-establishment of an independent Sheet Parish in January 1998. A petition in 2006 attracted over 250 signatures and the

2010 petition had 281 signatures. EHDC's first consultation in 2011 showed that 315 people of those who responded wanted a Sheet Parish Council. People wanted a Sheet Parish Council. Independence would give the community greater control over its assets and enable the production of a Village Design Statement and Parish Plan and be actively involved in shaping the community. Mr Shore stated that SVA were very confident that a Sheet Parish Council was going to happen and on a wider boundary than perhaps the Town Council would wish. This was what residents wished to happen and was aligned to the Government's localism agenda. It was important that Sheet had good relations with Petersfield moving forward.

- It was understood that some Councillors were favouring a mini Sheet Boundary constrained by the A272 and London Road. This boundary would ignore the express wishes of over 125 people who would be excluded and would also be completely uneconomic. The report before Councillors stated that this boundary was the most cost-neutral option. SVA did not agree with this statement. A mini Sheet would have an income of £40,868, £20,219 from precept and £20,649 from direct income. There was a budgeted direct cost of £32,617 and there needed to be an allowance of £19,000 to cover indirect costs such as the Parish Clerk, insurance, legal costs, grants and contingency. This gave annual cost of £51,617 - an annual deficit of £10,749 which would require an increase in precept of 53% which was not considered viable.
- SVA did not believe that the Town Council should be concerned about a wider boundary. The proposed butterfly boundary would have a total income of £54,984, £34,335 from precept and £20,649 from direct income. Direct costs of £35,368, an allowance of £19,000 to cover indirect costs giving a total annual cost of £54,368 giving an annual surplus of £616. This is the minimum boundary that gives Sheet financial viability. SVA stated that the Town Council would be £19,616 worse off a year; 4% of the Town Council's precept and 2.4% of its total expenditure.
- SVA were not against changes to the Butterfly boundary and recognise that there was relatively less support around Pulens Crescent (28 for, 17 against). Other areas outside the Butterfly showed support to being included; Ramshill Estate (42 for, 1 against), Shear Hill and the west side of Pulens Lane (25 for, 2 against) and Love Lane, Merryfields Road and Hazelbank Close (22 votes for, 2 against).

To summarise Mr Shore asked the Town Council to accept that a Sheet Parish was going to happen and to work with them to mitigate some of the factors causing concern. SVA felt that the statistics showed that the financial impact on Petersfield was marginal. Finally Mr Shore asked that the Town Council recommends the establishment of a Sheet Parish Council with a large enough boundary to make it economically viable.

Mr Richard Wilshin advised those present that the 2007 Act comprised of 278 pages and over 24 sections were relevant to Governance Reviews. Guidance had been issued by the Secretary of State and EHDC, as the principle council in this matter, must have regard to that guidance. There were 53 pages to that document. In the time allotted Mr Wilshin wished to emphasise six of the essential points from the guidance:

- The effectiveness and convenience of local government is best understood in the context of a local authority's ability to deliver quality services economically and efficiently and give users of services a democratic voice in the decisions that affect them.
- Community Governance arrangements should reflect, and be sufficiently representative of, people living across the whole community and not just a discrete cross-section or small part of it.
- Community Governance arrangements should be declined where the effect would be likely to damage community cohesion.
- A principal council should consider whether a recommendation made by petitioners will undermine community cohesion in any part of its area.
- The general rule should be that the parish is based on an area which reflects community identity and interest and which is of a size which is viable as an administrative unit of local government.
- A parish council should be in a position to provide some basic services.

Mr Wilshin stated that he was looking to Petersfield Town Council as the most immediate representation of the community interest to represent strongly to EHDC that a reorganisation order should not be made in response to this petition. The Town of Petersfield was a cohesive and viable community and he considered that it was not sensible to remove the value of the properties within a 'Sheet Parish' from the Petersfield Town Council precept.

C 0335

SHEET GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Members received a report from the Town Clerk regarding the Sheet Governance Review second consultation (copy attached to these minutes at Appendix A) and were asked to form a response to EHDC.

Members went through the Town Clerk's report to formulate answers to the question asked by EHDC, as written in the Town Clerk's report.

It was stated that Sheet had made a good case and would have plenty of candidates for election to the Parish Council, if it was formed. The view was expressed that these candidates should have put themselves forward for Petersfield in the elections held in May. Members generally felt that it was difficult to comment on the sustainability of any future council in terms of numbers of councillors or potential candidates. Sheet Village Association had indicated that there were plenty of willing candidates.

One member voiced the personal view that Sheet was best served through the existing arrangements, within the Petersfield Town Council area and agreed with the comments submitted to EHDC by Mr Richard Wilshin. It was felt that the butterfly boundary was contrived. Pulens Crescent and roads off (Geddes Way, Rother Close and Copse Close) together with Pulens Lane between Love Lane and Heathfield Road were in the Rother Ward of Petersfield. The original advice to the 3 groups that have proposed a Sheet Parish over the last 10 years was that it would be sensible to confine any proposed boundary to a subset of St Mary's Ward; it was difficult to accept that this area in particular was not an integral part of Petersfield. Comments

on the various boundaries were made and the point was also made that the Boundary Commission's current consultation document did not include any changes to the Petersfield Ward Boundaries. Whilst it was not disputed that Sheet would be able to sustain a Parish Council concerns about the sustainability of very small Parish Councils, generally, was doubted.

Members discussed how many councillors would be expected on a new Sheet Parish Council. The minimum legal requirement was 5. Following discussion it was

RESOLVED that EHDC be informed that Petersfield Town Council would expect to see 8 councillors for any new Sheet Parish Council.

Members felt that the large boundary was not acceptable and that the Butterfly boundary should not be expanded. It was felt that Ramshill, Pulens Lane etc. had simply been added to make a new Parish Council more viable. Concern was expressed that figures from Sheet Village Association and those provided by the Town Clerk were so far apart. Concern was raised regarding the cost to Petersfield and it was suggested that the boundary agreed should be cost neutral as far as Petersfield was concerned.

RESOLVED that the preferred boundary for any future Sheet Parish Council be the butterfly with the amendment that the boundary should follow the river as a boundary line across to and just above Love Lane excluding Rother Close but including property on the east side of Pulens Lane.

Members discussed the future of Sheet Allotments. Plot holders had expressed concern that if they did not live in Sheet they may lose their tenancies. Sheet Village Association had stated that this was not the case. Members were advised that the Allotment Association had been approached by a member of Sheet Village Association advising that they would support devolvement of management of the Allotments to the Allotment Association, if a new Sheet Parish was formed.

The Town Clerk advised that Petersfield may not be able to fulfil allotment provision for Petersfield without Sheet Allotments. Allotment law stated that residents within the parish had precedence for allotments.

Members were keen to safeguard the plot holders of Sheet Allotments and it was

RESOLVED that if the new Parish of Sheet was established then Sheet Allotments should be included providing EHDC ensures security of tenure for the existing tenants living in Petersfield and that no bias is shown to Sheet residents for new plots.

It was stated that EHDC should consider holding a referendum once a boundary had been agreed. Some members felt that sufficient consultation had been carried out, but not all agreed that this was the case.

Concern was raised that reserves may also be affected if a new Parish of Sheet was formed. The Town Clerk voiced the opinion that he thought this would

be extremely unlikely but would be a matter of discussion at a later date. If reserves were involved then the matter would come back to the Town Council for discussion.

Concern was also raised that the financial impact on the residents had not been part of the consultation process.

The Town Clerk advised that the consultation had now closed. EHDC officers would be making a recommendation to EHDC at the beginning of December when a decision would be made on whether to allow the formation of a Sheet Parish Council or not.

Further discussion took place on the financial impact if a new Parish of Sheet was formed. Concern was raised regarding the level of grant aid currently provided by Petersfield Town Council, this may have to be reduced and therefore the support for local organisations would be reduced within Petersfield. It was pointed out that a new Sheet Parish may wish to support local organisations through grant aid of their own.

It was agreed that there were pros and cons for a new Parish of Sheet but if it was decided to go ahead then the Town Council would have to work with the new parish.

RESOLVED that Petersfield Town Council accept the formation of a Sheet Parish Council if it was the will of residents providing that the cost implication to Petersfield were minimal.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.16 pm.



Sheet Governance Review

Second Consultation

Introduction

Members will recall the discussion held during the summer during the initial consultation undertaken by East Hampshire District Council (EHDC) into the potential creation of a separate parish of Sheet.

At the EHDC Council meeting of 8th September 2011 consideration was given to the results of this initial consultation, following which this resolution was passed:

- (i) That the current Community Governance Review based on the following two options continue:**
 - (a) That a new Sheet Parish Council be established; and**
 - (b) The existing arrangements, within Petersfield Town Council area to continue; and**
- (ii) the above proposals be published and a second stage of consultation be embarked upon.**

The consultation is due to close on 31st October 2011, however the Town Council has been granted an extension to enable it to respond because the detailed information that you, as members needed in order to make an informed decision was not received until 19th October 2011.

The Council is now required to provide a response to the 6 questions posed by EHDC in their letter received 30th September 2011.

For the sake of clarity, the following facilities are currently managed and administered within the community of Sheet:

- Sheet Village Hall
- Sheet Village Green
- Sheet recreation ground including the childrens play area
- Sheet Common
- Old Billiard Room
- Sheet Allotments
- Millennium Meadow
- Small parcel of land on Mill Lane adjacent to river bank
- Small parcel of land in Old Mill Lane

1 Please could you outline your view on the sustainability of any future Sheet Parish Council in terms of numbers of councillors or potential candidates

This issue is necessarily highly subjective. It would be expected that in the initial period there would be no difficulty in finding the number of potential councillor candidates to come forward and represent the community. The issue of sustainability really then hinges on opinion of what will happen in the future when the initial enthusiasm has waned and maybe the reality of what is required to undertake the role of a councillor is realised.

There are many parishes across the country that fail to obtain sufficient numbers of councillors to stand in order to trigger an election every four years. Currently, there are 6,738 properties in Petersfield (EHDC figures) that support 12 councillors; that is 1 councillor for every 561 properties. The minimum number of councillors permissible for a parish council to have is 5 (Local Government Act 1972 s 16(1)) and from previous meetings I have attended it was suggested that the proposed butterfly boundary contained 600 properties although this is disputed by the detailed Precept information supplied by EHDC this week which indicates just 372 properties are included. Whichever figure proves to be accurate, it will require a significantly increased level of councillor representation per property (possibly 1 councillor per 74 properties) than we currently have. Petersfield Town Council has had its own difficulties in finding sufficient candidates for every ward in the town for at least the last 2 elections which would suggest that in the long-term the ability to generate enough candidates within the community of Sheet may be problematic.

One of the key strengths of the parish sector as community representatives within local government is its electoral legitimacy. This strength is necessarily weakened and diminished by the more local councils that do not and cannot trigger 4-yearly elections.

Similarly, at national level, questions have been asked on the sustainability of the smallest parish councils and whether some need to amalgamate in order to achieve economies of scale. This issue is also being addressed at local authority level with EHDC seeking partners in the delivery of some services in order to reduce costs. The loss of these economies of scale could have an adverse impact on the ability of Petersfield to respond positively to the forthcoming 'Localism' agenda from central government.

2 How many councillors would you expect to see on a Sheet Parish Council?

The application for independent parish status indicates that a council consisting of 6 – 8 members is envisaged. As indicated above, the legal minimum is 5 councillors so if a new parish council is created in Sheet then a number towards the lower end of that quoted in the application would seem to be reasonable, subject of course to the concerns over the long-term sustainability of maintaining this number.

3 Broadly, what is your view on the financial impact of a new council, to both those within the 'boundary' and on Petersfield Town Council.

The financial impact is clearly dependent on the nature of any 'boundary'. Members have been provided with 3 potential boundaries by EHDC although it is stressed that none of them can be confirmed as definite, suggesting that some modifications may be acceptable, assuming that a new parish is created. The potential loss of income under each of these 3 options is tabulated below along with the costs that we currently incur in the management and maintenance of facilities within Sheet (requested as question 4 and already submitted by email).

	<u>Precept Loss</u>	<u>Current net cost</u>	<u>PTC cost</u>
Butterfly boundary	34,335	14,719	19,616
Butterfly plus Ramshill	50,347	14,719	35,628
Larger boundary	103,063	14,719	88,344
Alternate Boundary 1*	20,219	14,719	5,500

The Precept loss figure is that quoted within the Detailed Precept Information figures provided by EHDC.

The current net cost figure is the current cost of maintaining the facilities in Sheet from this financial year's budget less the projected income generated from those services.

The PTC cost figure reflects the financial cost to this Council of this boundary being adopted.

The financial cost to Petersfield residents of either the 'butterfly plus Ramshill' or the larger boundary options are quite significant, being 7.18% and 17.8% of the current Precept respectively that would have to be passed on to the remaining residents of Petersfield if the current level of services are to be maintained. For those within the proposed boundaries it would represent an annual saving on their Council Tax of £5 and £13 respectively based on a Band D equivalent.

The costs quoted above do not include officer time in administering or inspecting the sites however this sum would be very modest and mainly involve junior members of staff.

The butterfly boundary still represents 4% of the current Precept if approved which is quite a significant cost for the residents of Petersfield to bear.

All of the above options could potentially lead to this Council losing some economies of scale when it comes to seeking to deliver services however this is unquantifiable at this stage and would probably remain so until it comes to negotiating and obtaining prices from suppliers.

The 'Alternate boundary 1' option that would include Old Mill Lane, and Sheet Common would seem to be the most 'cost neutral' option available if a new Sheet parish is created.

*The Alternate Boundary 1 option figures marked * will need confirmation from EHDC but are my estimate from the Detailed Precept Information Data provided by EHDC.*

If a new parish council is formed for Sheet, there may be staffing implications for Petersfield Town Council that are at this stage unquantifiable. It should be borne in mind that if there are any needs for redundancies as a result of a new parish council being created, a number of staff are at an age that would require the Council to incur significant costs in paying for additional pension as well as redundancy payments.

One of the ways in which the financial impact of a new Sheet Parish Council could be minimised is if the new council is serviced by Petersfield Town Council with the time involved being charged back to the new council. Clearly such a scheme, if approved would need a significant amount of thought and planning but it does remain as a possibility for consideration.

4 Costs and income relating to the current assets within the proposed butterfly boundary.

	<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Net cost</u>
Sheet Village Hall	16,946	20,056	3,110
Sheet Village Green		728	728
Sheet recreation ground	142	5,090	4,948
Sheet Common		2,751	2,751
Old Billiard Room	489	320	-169
Sheet Allotments	3,072	4,504	1,432
Millennium Meadow		1,000	1,000
Mill Lane		315	315
Land in Old Mill Lane		604	604
Total	20,649	35,368	14,719

All figures are based on those within Petersfield Town Council budget for the current financial year.

5 What is your preferred boundary for any future Sheet Parish Council?

Members may wish to state their desire for a creation of a new parish in Sheet or not as part of this response.

In considering the financial implications of a potential new parish council in Sheet it would seem that the most cost-neutral option would be the 'Alternate Boundary 1' plus Old Mill Lane and Sheet Common.

6 What are your plans for the future of Sheet Allotments? What in your view should happen to the allotments should a Sheet Parish Council be established?

In considering the future of Sheet Allotments it is important to consider the current and future needs of the residents of Petersfield for allotment provision. The number of plots currently provided is:

Tilmore	68 plots
Sheet	105 plots

The waiting list at present is:

Tilmore	39
Sheet	36

There are 14 people on both waiting lists. There is therefore a significant and continuing demand for allotments from Petersfield residents.

At present, of the 105 plots at Sheet, just 14 are to people living in Sheet. Of those on the waiting list, just 5 are from Sheet.

These figures clearly demonstrate that the need for allotments is far greater amongst Petersfield residents than those in Sheet. The potential loss of these allotments would cause serious difficulties to Petersfield Town Council in being able to satisfy the demand for allotments from residents and fulfil its legal obligations with regard to allotment provision. Legislation permits

the Council to hold land for allotments outside of its parish boundaries and it would seem appropriate for the Town Council to retain the Sheet allotment site if a new Sheet Parish Council is created. If considered appropriate, the land between the Millennium Meadow and Mill Lane could be provided to any new Sheet Parish Council for them to develop into their own allotments.

Summary

This report is designed to inform and generate debate over the Council's response to this consultation rather than providing firm recommendations. I am still making enquiries over the legislation that governs potential asset transfers such as this to ascertain the correct process and understand the obligations of all parties.

Neil Hitch
Town Clerk
21st October 2011