



## **Community Governance Review for Corsham**

### **1. Background**

Corsham has grown by over 20 percent in the last 10 years and the settlement is due to expand much further in the next decade. The Town Council is positive about managing development and there is a strong desire for us to take the lead through the Core Strategy, Strategic Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. It is critical that this growth is sustainable. This means balancing economic, social and environmental considerations. In order to achieve this sustainable growth, the geographical area covered by the Town Council must be critically reviewed. The Community Governance Review (CGR) is very clearly the most appropriate review mechanism. So, when the opportunity arose in 2013/14 to put forward a case for a Community Governance Review of Corsham, the Town Council was, and still is, very supportive.

### **2. The Proposals and Benefits**

The Corsham CGR is complex. Communities and Local Government's (CLG's) Guidance on Community Governance Reviews is set out very clearly so there is no need to go over the details in this report. The Town Council's reasons and justifications for its proposal are as follows:

Corsham's existing parish boundaries are not based on the reality of where communities are now, and where they are planned to develop. A CGR would address this. The case for a CGR is made more urgent by wishing to set sensible boundaries for our Neighbourhood Plan (NP). A failure to get boundary changes will not remove the need for a NP but would diminish its effectiveness in an area of considerable importance to the Corsham settlement.

Corsham's current boundaries have little relevance to our current communities or planned development under the Draft Core Strategy and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Economic Plan. The planned development of Chippenham to our east and developments to the west of Corsham demand a logical review of where community boundaries lie. The Government believes that effective local government should be judged on its ability to deliver high quality services economically and efficiently and give a democratic voice to the people who use

them. The Town Council, which already serves the town and surrounding villages of Gastard, Neston and Westwells, as well as several smaller settlements, is in a strong position to deliver services to an expanding community in a highly cost-effective and sensitive way, reflecting the needs of different communities. New boundaries will provide the basis of greater integration of our communities, around a common vision of how we meet the challenges and benefits from the opportunities the future offers. We are not a local council fixed in the past, but one seeking to achieve the very best possible outcomes from change. The Town Council aims to realise the aspirations and needs of our whole community through protecting our heritage and environment, and being proactive in providing the required homes and economic growth, supported by the necessary infrastructure. We are not seeking to simply increase our revenues. Indeed, we would seek to reduce the burden on all our council tax payers by improving the services we provide while achieving economies of scale.

Many of the advantages of a CGR for Corsham are identified below. The list is not exhaustive.

A Community Governance Review of Corsham could:

- Correct parish boundary anomalies through Rudloe and Westwells
- Replace the arbitrary parish boundaries which dissect and divide Rudloe housing estate and would avoid people living in different parishes to their neighbours
- Put in place clearer settlement boundaries and identities for Corsham and Box, based on fixed features which are likely to remain in place for many years.
- Facilitate the future sustainable development and expansion of Corsham
- Provide clearer and effective governance of Corsham and Box, with more inclusive participation, representation and leadership
- Offer more efficient, cost-effective and convenient delivery of council services at a local level
- Enable a clear and effective Neighbourhood Plan to be produced for Corsham
- Build a stronger, cohesive and more engaged Rudloe community which feels part of one place
- Improve democracy, electoral accountability and representation with increased elected representation in a new/merged ward
- Update out-of-date historic boundaries

- Strengthen relationships with MOD Corsham and businesses to the west of Westwells Road, promoting an economically vibrant community
- Align the boundary to likely changes in housing and employment land as indicated in the Wiltshire Core Strategy and Wiltshire and Swindon Strategic Economic Plan
- Bring Corsham Primary School (Broadwood site) into Corsham, where the majority of pupils reside
- Provide a building block for the unitary council division ward boundaries

### 3. The Proposals (Existing and Revised)

The original proposal (**Appendix A**) put forward by the Town Council follows CLG published guidance. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that following the guidance very strictly resulted in using the few available recognised and established boundaries of the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the A365. The Town Council does not expect a great deal of this area to be developed but without a suitable alternative at the time of the original submission, there was little choice.

Since that time, however, there has been a new planning permission granted which provides a more meaningful boundary between the two parishes. Wadswick Green, the former Royal Arthur naval training base has been granted permission to create a new access road leading from the Bradford Road to the rear of its site (**Appendix B**) - *Application no. 14/04012/FUL*. Therefore, the Town Council is able to submit an amendment to its original proposal primarily using the new access road as the new parish boundary (**Appendix C**). This new proposal also takes care of the anomaly which is that currently, the Wadswick Green development straddles the two parishes.

### 4. Addressing Box Parish Council's Concerns

Box Parish Council has commented on the Town Council's original proposal and raised a few concerns. Those concerns include parish identity; the boundary itself; the size of the area which could be changed, and viability. Most, if not all, of those concerns have been addressed in the new proposal, or are not, in any case, relevant if CLG's guidance is followed. Box Parish Council's concerns are largely about finance and a claimed reduction in services. CGRs are not designed to address funding issues, and service levels will be maintained or enhanced as a result of the proposed boundary change. CGRs are about effective community engagement and governance, and the Town Council has submitted a proposal that deals with the heart of this issue.

## 5. Other Factors

An outline Planning Application has, this week, been received for the former MOD site known as Rudloe Site Two, Westwells Road (**Appendix D**). The application is for up to 180 dwellings and economic development, parking and open space (*Application no. 14/11354/OUT*). The application identifies the local plan designations around the area and is clearly shown as an extension to the Corsham settlement, and bears no relationship to Box village.

Box Parish Council asserts in its response to the Town Council's CGR submission that MOD Corsham 'is currently in Corsham parish'. In actual fact, the parish boundary cuts through MOD Corsham and is currently in both parishes (**Appendix E**). It is unfortunate that Box Parish Council does not know its own boundary and the community which it serves. MOD is, of course, the largest employer in the area.

Corsham Town Council is taking a proactive and pragmatic approach to the CGRs. It has considered carefully the CGR proposals by Chippenham Town Council to move its boundary with Corsham to the A350 in the north east of our parish. Corsham Town Council has raised no objections, in principle, to this proposal. The land to the north east of our parish is much more aligned to the Chippenham settlement where its businesses and residents would naturally look to for its services, facilities and amenities.

## 6. Conclusion

Corsham Town Council believes that a Community Governance Review is long overdue, and essential if Corsham is to expand and develop in a sustainable and manageable way. It has considered Box Parish Council's concerns and acknowledged them through submitting a revised proposal which reduces the area to be transferred by over 50 percent. This new proposal should meet the needs of both communities now and in the foreseeable future.

*Report prepared by David Martin BA (Hons) Chief Executive, Councillor Mrs Ruth Hopkinson (Chairman) and Peter Pearson (Vice-Chairman).*

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