

## Community Governance Review for Willingham and Over – Appendix H

## Over Parish Council

Parish Clerk: Linda Poulter

### Community Governance Review of Willingham and Over Parish Boundary

#### Formal response from Over Parish Council

Over Parish Council rejects the proposal to alter the boundary between Willingham and Over. It believes that the current boundary, which has served its purpose for 400 years and is clearly defined, should remain unchanged. Our specific objections to the Community Governance Review are outlined below:

**1. The consultation launch was inadequate**

A letter, dated 21 February 2017, was sent from SCDC to every household inviting **residents** to “participate in the consultation for this review” and directing them to an **online** questionnaire where they could have their say. This letter **could have** included a simple summary of the proposal, a map of the options and a response form – and might even have given a **closing date** for the responses – **but it didn’t**. It just gave a link to the full Terms of Reference, a document that is not easily digested and may well put off a casual reader. Furthermore, some of the links from SCDC’s website were unclear or just incorrect, although the errors were later corrected.

**2. The consultation was unfairly structured**

SCDC’s introductory letter was addressed to the **dwelling** and began “Dear Resident”, and presumably empowered **anyone living there** (of whatever age) to respond. It is unclear whether the consultation was intended for **electors** (or any other residents) **individually**, or whether just a single response per household was being solicited. More worryingly, the response required access to, and familiarity with, a computer in order to view the key documents and complete the questionnaire. This requirement would have predominantly disenfranchised the older residents, the very people who might be expected to put a greater value on historic boundaries.

**3. The local sets of hardcopies were incomplete and inadequate**

Even if an elderly person had walked to Over Community Centre and picked up a copy of the full Terms of Reference, they would still have been required to wade through pages of complex text with headings like “*Reorganisation of Community Governance Orders and Commencement*” and “*Consequential Matters*”. There is no guidance in the Terms of Reference as to the precise nature of the response that is required. In Para 1.2 it says that the review will consider an alteration to the boundary, in Para 1.3 it incorrectly describes the area involved (omitting Over Mereway) and in Para 1.8 it says that there are two alternative boundaries – **but it doesn’t set out the actual question being asked** (i.e. Should it remain as it is or follow Option A or Option B?).

**4. This Community Governance Review is unusual**

This CGR is unusual in the sense that it affects such a very small number of electors. Community Governance Reviews are complex and expensive exercises and should surely be expected **either** to involve significant numbers of electors **or** to correct glaring electoral or social injustices. This one does neither - a mere handful of electors are dissatisfied with their electoral assignment and would prefer to be part of a different electoral community. To correct that perceived injustice, they have managed to collect sufficient signatures from friends, customers and business partners to trigger this review – but it sets a most unwelcome precedent, raising the prospect of similar petty boundary adjustments throughout the district.

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**5. A boundary adjustment would bring very few benefits**

Apart from the cosy glow of feeling a part of Willingham, rather than Over, there can be very few local services that would be delivered more effectively by moving the boundary a couple of hundred metres. The sun will shine just as brightly, the rain will fall just as often, the post will continue to arrive, and customers will just as readily cross the threshold of the shops involved.

**6. A boundary change would create electoral anomalies**

The electoral arrangements would become complex, with the electors involved in the boundary change ending up in different groupings for Parish, Ward and Division elections. No doubt this anomaly might be resolved in due course, but the Boundaries Commission has only recently completed a review of electoral boundaries within the county and may not be keen to see its work amended so quickly and for such a trivial reason.

**7. The proposed alternative boundaries are not as clearly defined**

The 'green' option, as defined on the official CGR map, tracks across open fields alongside the Highgate development. This becomes obvious when the route is superimposed on an aerial view of the area: the accompanying map is a GIS map with the most recent 2013 aerial overlay enabled. A boundary defined by Over Mereway and Haden Way is far clearer than a route crossing fields, or even following existing hedge-lines, since hedges are far less permanent physical features.

**8. The current boundary is historic and should be respected**

This boundary was established in its current position in 1618, 400 years ago, to put an end to the frequent boundary disputes on the fens between Over and Willingham. Over, which was larger than Willingham at that time, occupied the drier part of the 'intercommoned' land, but in adverse weather conditions there were many squabbles over the better pasture. Parish boundaries had great significance at that time, and a detailed record exists of the Great Perambulation of 1602, when both parishes used a particularly dry period to walk around their boundaries, meeting up close to this point for "*solemn drinkage with prayers and thanksgiving and singing of psalms*".

**Summary**

In conclusion, Over Parish Council wants to retain the **current** Parish boundary, which has served its purpose for hundreds of years. Willingham has chosen to develop right up to its western boundary and seeks to expand further – but why shouldn't it develop within its existing borders elsewhere? There is plenty of open land to the east and to the north that they could develop, so we don't see any reason to concede a part of **our** Parish to our acquisitive neighbours in Willingham.

This is not the first time that Willingham has asked to move this boundary, and it is unlikely to be the last, but we can see no compelling reason to concede to their demand on this issue.

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Parish Boundary Proposals

