

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Electoral Arrangements Committee

22 March 2012

AUTHOR/S: Legal Services Manager

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – HAUXTON PARISH COUNCIL

Purpose

1. To consider a request from Hauxton Parish Council to increase the number of parish councillors from seven to nine.

Background

2.
 - (a) A request has been received from Hauxton Parish Council that the number of councillors on the Parish Council be increased from seven to nine. A copy of the request is attached at Appendix A.
 - (b) The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) provides for a Principal Council to conduct a review of the community governance arrangements for the whole or part of its area for the purpose of considering whether or not to make any changes to Parish boundaries or size, and/or the creation of new parishes; and the review of the electoral arrangements for new and/or existing parishes. If, following a review, the Council decides that changes should be made to the electoral arrangements; they may make an Order giving effect to the changes. Electoral arrangements include the number of councillors on the Parish Council.
 - (c) Section 95 of the 2007 Act provides inter alia that when considering the number of councillors to be elected for the parish as a whole, the authority must have regard to the number of electors for the parish, and any change in that number likely to occur in the next five years.

Considerations

3. The National Association of Local Councils recommends that seven is the minimum number of parish councillors per council for “good administration”. (The minimum number of Councillors is fixed at 5 by the Local Government Act 1972.) Increasing the number to 9 for the Parish Council at Hauxton would:
 - i) help to ensure that meetings are quorate,
 - ii) ease the significant workload burden on the current councillors, and
 - iii) may help to increase the possibility of representation across the Parish
4. The current electorate of the parish of Hauxton is 562 and this is projected to change significantly, perhaps double, due to the proposed development of the former Bayer site and building of up to 330 homes by 2019. By the same year Trumpington Meadows is expected to have 629 new homes.
 - (d) Appendix B shows the electorates for the Parish Councils in South Cambridgeshire with 7 and 9 councillors and with electorates broadly similar

to Hauxton. There is no “rule of thumb” for how many Parish Councillors an area should elect. There are parishes with both smaller and larger electorates than Hauxton, which currently elect nine councillors.

- (e) The existing guidance on Parish Reviews issued by Department for Communities and Local Government and The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (March 2010), In relation to the size of Parish Councils, says that:
- (i) In practice, there is a wide variation of council size between parish councils. That variation appears to be influenced by population. Research by the Aston Business School Parish and Town Councils in England (HMSO, 1992), found that the typical parish council representing less than 500 people had between 5 and 8 councillors; those between 501 and 2,500 had 6 to 12 councillors; and those between 2,501 and 10,000 had 9 to 16 councillors. Most parish councils with a population of between 10,001 and 20,000 had between 13 and 27 councillors, while almost all councils representing a population of over 20,000 had between 13 and 31 councillors.
 - (ii) The LGBC has no reason to believe that this pattern of council size to population has altered significantly since the research was conducted. Although not an exact match, it broadly reflects the council size range set out in the National Association of Local Councils Circular 1126; the Circular suggested that the minimum number of councillors for any parish should be 7 and the maximum 25.
 - (iii) In considering the issue of council size, the LGBC is of the view that each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities. Nevertheless, having regard to the current powers of parish councils, it should consider the broad pattern of existing council sizes. This pattern appears to have stood the test of time and, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, has provided for effective and convenient local government.
 - (iv) Principal councils should also bear in mind that the conduct of parish council business does not usually require a large body of councillors. In addition, historically many parish councils, particularly smaller ones, have found difficulty in attracting sufficient candidates to stand for election. This has led to uncontested elections and/or a need to co-opt members in order to fill vacancies. However, a parish council's budget and planned or actual level of service provision may also be important factors in reaching conclusions on council size.

Implications

- 3. The Council must consult interested parties on a review of electoral arrangements for Hauxton Parish Council and take into account any representations received. The review must be conducted having regard to the need to secure that community governance within the area reflects the identities and interests of the community, and is effective and convenient.
- 4. There will be an associated cost in conducting the review based on officer time in consulting interested parties however the cost will be low given the limited area for review and it is considered to be proportionate in the circumstances given the full and proper reasons given by the Parish in their request for a review. Officer time will therefore be well spent in conducting the consultation and reporting back to this

Committee with the response with the aim of enabling more effective and convenient governance for Hauxton Parish. It is suggested that officers engage with the Parish to work together in consulting interested parties in the Parish.

Recommendations

5. That Electoral Arrangements Committee:
 - (a) Instigate a community governance review with terms of reference limited to consideration of an increase in the number of parish councillors from 7 to 9 as requested by Hauxton Parish Council.
 - (b) Instruct officers to consult with interested parties in the parish based on the information contained within this report including the reasons given by Hauxton Parish Council in their request for a review.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
Guidance on Community Governance Reviews issued jointly by Local Government Boundary Commission and Communities and Local Government

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APPENDIX A

From: Suzanne Donovan [mailto:hauxtonpcclerk@btinternet.com]
Sent: 20 January 2012 14:52
To: Lord David
Subject: Re: Hauxton

Hello David,
Hauxton Parish Council, at its meeting on January 2012, agreed to ask SCDC to undertake a Community Governance Review, pursuant to the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The parish council would like to increase its number of councillors from seven to nine.

The main reasons for this are:

1. The expansion of the village from the Bayer site development. (This could double the village's population.)
2. The increased workload faced by the council from the Bayer site, and the Trumpington Meadows development.
3. The council would like to have sufficient members to set up viable committees. (For many issues, several members have declared interests, leaving us with few remaining members to make decisions. Without committees, issues are discussed in detail at full parish council meetings, which takes considerable time.)
4. Spending s106 money from the Bayer development will involve extensive public consultation and more work for the council.

The parish council appreciates that if a review goes ahead and agrees with the council's request, it will not generate new council places for the May election.

Best wishes,
Suzanne

APPENDIX B

7 Parish Councillors		9 Parish Councillors	
Parish	Electorate	Electorate	Parish
Arrington	324	673	Barton
		768	Bourn
Barrington	762	548	Castle Camps
		678	Coton
Great Abington	646	526	Elsworth
Great Wilbraham	532	604	Fen Ditton
Hauxton	562	696	Fen Drayton
Hinxton	254	941	Fowlmere
Horningsea	285	972	Foxton
Horseheath	387	441	Grantchester
Little Abington	433	799	Guilden Morden
Pampisford	257	549	Ickleton
Shepreth	620	674	Landbeach
Stow-cum-Quy	410	674	Litlington
Toft	482	640	Little Shelford
West Wrating	370	870	Orwell
Weston Colville	361	862	Steeple Morden
Whaddon	378	882	Thriplow & Heathfield