

CHARLTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling
Chairman, Electoral Review Committee
Wiltshire Council
County Hall
Trowbridge
BA14 8JN

27 April 2022

Dear Mr Blair-Pilling

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – MALMESBURY TOWN

1. I write at the direction of Charlton Parish Council (PC). Charlton PC met on Thu 7 Apr and voted by a clear majority to reject draft recommendation 8.4 in Wiltshire Council's Community Governance Review 2021/22 Draft Recommendations, that the area marked as O be transferred from St Paul Malmesbury Without to the parish of Charlton.
2. We start by looking at the reasons the Electoral Review Committee have given for the draft recommendation. This is not to belittle the work of the Committee but because it feeds into our main reasons for rejecting the draft recommendation. The quotes are from paragraph 119 of the Draft Recommendations document.
 - a. 'It was reported that the parish of Charlton to the north might be interested in joining with the community at Milbourne'. Well of course Charlton 'might' be interested, so 'might' Lea Parish be interested in joining with the community at Milbourne, and Brokenborough 'might' be interested in joining with the community at Filands north of the B4014, Yet, only Charlton was mentioned despite neither the PC nor the community having been asked at this stage.
 - b. '... which lay within or alongside the Charlton Park estate'. This is simply wrong. The 'community at Milbourne', ie Milbourne village presumably, is certainly not within the Charlton Park Estate and none of the land between Milbourne village and the B4040 is Charlton Park land. Yes the land to the north of the B4040 is estate land but that's well away from the Milbourne community.

c. '... and had decent road connections'. Yes the B4040 runs to Charlton but the C67, which much of Milbourne village sits on, runs into Lea Parish directly and one has to drive through Lea parish to get to Charlton parish.

Two further reasons for the decision on the draft recommendation were stated in our Thu 7 Apr on-line meeting with you, both to do with social contacts between Milbourne and Charlton:

d. Sharing a CSW equipment. It is true that Milbourne and Charlton share CSW equipment., but this is entirely a business arrangement which was put in place by Wiltshire Police.

e. Cricket was said to be a source of social contact, in fact it seemed that the Committee thought this was a strong cause of social contact. There is in fact one single Milbourne player who plays with the Charlton cricket team (he has confirmed this fact to us).

But it does not appear that anyone thought about the numbers of properties and electors in the 2 areas. The Area marked as O has 172 properties and 328 electors; Charlton Parish has 180 properties and 364 electors. So adding this area to Charlton would cause an increase of 95.5% of properties and 90% of electors; and in the new area 49% of precept payers¹ would not be from the current Charlton parish.

As presented, the PC concluded that the Committee's decision and draft recommendation appeared based on an exaggerated assessment of the links between the communities of Charlton and Milbourne.

3. We are aware from the draft recommendations document that any decision relating to parish arrangements must ensure that those arrangements:

- Reflect the identity and interests of local communities, and
- Ensure effective and convenient local governance.

We are also aware that these points stem from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's 'Guidance on community governance reviews'.

4. Reflecting the identity and interests of local communities.

a. We have shown above how the draft recommendation would double the size of Charlton Parish and cause 49% of precept payers to be not from the current Charlton parish.

b. There is no natural connection, no social interaction, between Milbourne and Charlton, and neither with Filands north of the B4014 and the 2 other farms off the Tetbury road. Charlton's main (and very strong) social interaction link is to Hankerton – the two communities have for a long time worked together to support operation of the Charlton Recreation Centre (which operates the Village Hall and Playing Field) with Hankerton residents

¹ The exact % share of the precept 'cash' would depend on the actual Band A-Band H breakdown of the new area. We cannot know this in advance. But this is true of the precept payers.

represented on its management committee and a strong Hankerton contingent in the cricket team. There is nothing of the sort with Milbourne or Filands north of the B4014.

c. The draft recommendation would force a complete change to the character of the parish, which is currently based on a single village Conservation Area settlement with a strong link to the Charlton Park Estate and family and a relatively well-populated area outside the village, the latter who are well-represented on the Parish Council².

We conclude that this change would not 'reflect the identity and interests of' Charlton.

5. Ensure effective and convenient local governance.

a. Once 49% of precept payers come from outside the current PC area we fear our current expenditure patterns could be in trouble at some point in the future. We give 2 examples:

1) The PC supports churchyard maintenance in the amount of £1000 annually, and this is justified because every parish resident has the right of burial in the churchyard³. This justification would be destroyed if Milbourne/Filands joined us as those 49% of precept payers are part of a separate Benefice in a separate Ecclesiastic Parish.

2) The PC supports the Village Hall by paying the insurance bill, at over £1000 annually. For a single-settlement parish this is justifiable and is accepted by those residents from the wider parish outside the village. But when 49% of precept payers are people who have had no such connection will they be content to subscribe so much to a Village Hall that is not theirs? They may be, but the fear is that over time this could become a bone of contention.

Far from ensuring effective and convenient local governance, this would put it at risk.

b. It is evident that the Committee see advantage in being able to end an anomaly in the arrangement of Wilts Council Divisions that the LGBCE regard as unsatisfactory. The situation is understood; but our view is that the current arrangement may be unsatisfactory to LGBCE but doesn't appear to have caused any real problem and that Charlton's status as a single-settlement parish should not be destroyed to effect the perceived administrative improvement.

6. Some Cllrs felt there was a democratic deficit in that residents of areas that were to change parish affiliation were written to by yourselves but residents of areas that would be expected to assume responsibility for these areas, whose own parish would be dramatically impacted by the proposal, were not written to by yourselves.

² We currently have 4 Cllrs from the village and 5 Cllrs from the wider parish.

³ Charlton Parish has the good fortune that the boundaries of the Civil Parish and the Ecclesiastic Parish are identical.

Added to this is the fact that the Committee did not engage with Charlton PC until the point when the draft recommendation was produced.

7. Finally you asked us, in our Thu 7 Apr on-line meeting with you, to make any suggestion for any 'subset' of the draft recommendation. I have to report that at the Charlton PC meeting no such decision was agreed as no Cllr had identified any parts of the area which they thought would fit more logically with Charlton parish.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Bromley Gardner

Michael Bromley Gardner
Clerk to Charlton Parish Council