

**ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 10.30am on 18 OCTOBER 2010**

Present: Councillors A J Ketteridge – Chairman
E J Godwin, J Salmon and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: R Procter (Democratic Services Manager),
P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager).

EAWG5 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Chamberlain.

EAWG6 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

EAWG7 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager referred Members to his report on submissions made at the first stage of the Community Governance Review of Foresthall Park and Priors Green. He reminded Members that the terms of reference and timetable for undertaking the review had already been agreed and confirmed by Finance and Administration Committee. Members needed to decide on draft proposals for any changes required to parish boundaries to be adopted for consultation from early November until 1 February 2011.

The first stage of the review had concluded at the end of September 2010, and the report before the meeting set out a number of responses which had been received, some of which included proposals for changing parish boundaries. It would be necessary to examine options and agree draft proposals for public consultation to allow for a period of approximately three months' consultation.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the two main provisions of the Review should be noted, to define and reflect community identity and to enable convenient delivery of local services. The parish council views were important, but the purpose of the review was chiefly to find out the views of local residents. Under the terms of reference it was necessary to agree draft proposals for any changes to the parish boundaries and electoral schemes for the parishes affected.

Foresthall Park

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager invited Members to consider responses to the Community Governance Review in relation to the parishes affected by the development at Foresthall Park.

Councillor Godwin said she felt Foresthall Park had not yet reached a stage of development where a separate parish could be considered, although this

could happen during the next few years. At present, there was little common cohesion, and there were not community facilities in it yet. People living there had access to such facilities in Stansted. The situation might change once the school was built.

Councillor Salmon said he did not think Foresthall Park would become a separate community requiring its own parish. However, he felt there was a community spirit, as shown by the fact that in the summer some residents had organised a barbecue for all those living on Foresthall Park.

Councillor Ketteridge said any movement towards creating a new parish should come from the residents themselves.

Members discussed proposals put forward by Birchanger and Stansted Parish Councils. Councillor Godwin said Birchanger Parish Council had agreed it would be the more logical plan for Foresthall Park to be part of Stansted Parish. However, the Parish Council had subsequently put forward an alternative proposal, to reflect the views of some Birchanger councillors who felt the size of the parish had already been reduced and that further erosion might jeopardise the parish altogether. This involved a realigned boundary that would establish Forest Hall Road as the demarcation between Birchanger and Stansted along most of its length, but would remove the entire new development site to Stansted.

Councillor Wilcock questioned whether residents of Birchanger would want their parish to include a big estate which seemed to have natural links within Stansted. Councillor Godwin said that historically much of Birchanger had already been eroded, due to the development of Stansted over the past 40 years, and it was for this reason that the second proposal was being put forward.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the fact that Birchanger had already been involved in two boundary changes was an important point. Ideally a boundary should be identified which could be either permanent or sustainable for the long-term. Foresthall Park residents would perhaps be less likely to wish to form their own parish in the future, if a settled boundary could be decided. It should be noted that in order for a new parish to be considered, there would need to be a great deal of evidence that this was what people wanted.

Councillor Wilcock suggested one option for residents of Foresthall Park would be to set up a residents' association. Councillor Godwin said community spirit on such developments tended to really come into existence only once the developers had gone – a process which could take six to ten years. Councillor Wilcock said he saw no reason why residents should not feel part of the Stansted community, particularly when the new health centre was established.

Councillor Godwin said Birchanger Primary School had already defined its catchment area, and residents at the new estate had the right to send their children there already, provided there were places available.

The Chairman noted the representatives of both parishes were in agreement that the entire Foresthall Park estate should be transferred to Stansted. On considering the proposals as shown on maps accompanying the report, and taking into account the comments made by Birchanger Parish Council, Members also agreed the proposed boundary should follow Parsonage Farm Lane from the existing boundary nearly to the junction with Forest Hall Road and then follow a line behind the two properties known as 1 and 2 Parsonage Farm Cottages, thus keeping these properties within Stansted, the line to then follow the middle of Forest Hall Road for the majority of its length, then along Stansted Road to the junction with Gipsy Lane and along the Lane, to meet the existing boundary, thus transferring to Stansted those properties located on Pines Hill south of the Old Bell Hotel, as well as all properties on the northern side of Forest Hall Road.

Members then discussed the effect of a boundary change on District Council wards. Members noted the Local Government Boundary Commission for England would be asked to make a consequential order changing district wards to match the new parish boundaries, but that this would not happen until after next year's local elections. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager drew to Members' attention the intention to defer for one year the parish elections of the two parishes affected by the boundary changes, which would enable an electoral scheme to be agreed. Ultimately, a further review of district wards would be undertaken and this would result in a revised warding scheme based on the number and distribution of electors at that time. Members were content with this timetable.

Members then considered in some detail the potential change in the balance of parish councillors for wards in Stansted, as well as the impact on polling arrangements. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager gave a summary of possible approaches which could be taken in terms of changing ward boundaries. He said whilst Stansted's south ward was quite large, it was not unduly so; and the important factor was whether the estate had a need for representation as a distinct community, or whether separate representation could be more divisive.

The Chairman agreed this was an important point. Councillor Godwin said whilst she accepted the point made earlier regarding access to community facilities in Stansted, in a few years the position could be very different, particularly once St Mary's School had been relocated and more houses built in the centre of the estate.

The Chairman proposed an electoral scheme in line with Option 1 of the report, whereby the transfer of the site at Foresthall Park from Birchanger to Stansted would have the following consequences for the electoral scheme for those parishes in 2015:

Parish	Electors 2015	Cllrs	Ward	Electors 2015	Cllrs
Option 1	Transfer to Stansted				
Birchanger	728	9			
Stansted	5817	15	North South	2342 3475	6 9

Priors Green

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer gave an overview of the submissions received in relation to this site. He said there was a likely prospect that the community at Priors Green would develop into a cohesive community, and the option of a separate parish was perhaps therefore more of a realistic possibility. The parish councils of Takeley and Little Canfield wished to keep the boundary division as it currently existed. Members should note the new community centre was just within Takeley, and a management agreement would shortly be finalised, providing for Little Canfield Parish Council to have a representative, but the facility would be operated as a charitable trust by local residents.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager drew to Members' attention an element of confusion prevailing amongst some residents between postal address and parish location, and the preference some occupiers had expressed for what they perceived as the 'rural' cachet of a Little Canfield address. For this and other reasons, many of the residents seemed to favour the transfer of the entire Priors Green site to Little Canfield.

Members considered the comments submitted by Takeley and Little Canfield Parish Councils, and by a number of different occupiers at the Priors Green site.

The Chairman questioned whether those consulted may have been wrongly under the impression their address might change as a result of a parish boundary change. It was important in future stages of the review to ensure residents were aware of the fact that a boundary change would have no effect on their postal address.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said post codes were solely dependent on which postal sorting office the addresses were assigned to, and in fact the Priors Green properties had originally been intended to be within the CM22 area. These addresses had been allocated by Royal Mail to Great Dunmow only because there was apparently insufficient capacity at their Bishop's Stortford sorting office.

Members considered there was a probability that occupiers at Priors Green would in time feel they belonged to a distinct community. The possibility of forming a new parish could therefore arise in the future. There had been a proposal to this effect submitted by Mr Perry of Dryvers Close and two

other responses to the review had placed this as their second preferred option.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer referred to options for the Priors Green site set out in the report. One option would be to merge the two parishes of Takeley and Little Canfield. He said this option had not been a submission by any occupiers, but was one which would have the benefit of achieving total integration of all parts of the new development and existing parishes, and would simplify management arrangements for the new community facilities. Alternatively, it would be feasible to group together the two parishes to achieve the same benefits but without a formal merger.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer said although the option of a merger was attractive for the reasons he had given, there would probably be resistance to such a concept from the two parish councils. However, it would be interesting to find out whether these proposals might be supported by residents.

Members considered the submissions received, noting there had been more responses received from Little Canfield than Takeley, and that some occupiers at the Priors Green site felt they were distinct from the two parishes. However, it was also apparent that Little Canfield had made progress in incorporating Priors Green residents into their community. The preferred option of both parish councils was to keep existing boundaries.

Members considered the options shown on the map, and noted there would in time be a school and shop on the Takeley side of the site. There was a possibility that further development would also take place on land to the east and north of the site. The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer warned that any boundaries defined now could be overgrown by future development.

The Chairman said he felt some concern about imposing a new parish where there was no strong interest in doing so.

Members felt the current boundaries should not be changed at present, in the absence of a firm proposal for change on which to consult. The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer suggested the consultation could give respondents the opportunity to choose options in order of preference.

Discussion took place on the geographical area of consultation. It was agreed that occupiers in the immediate vicinity of Priors Green should also be asked for their views including those at Dunmow Road, Jacks Lane and Smiths Green.

Electoral arrangements were then considered, and Members noted there would be justification for an increase in the present number of parish and ward councillors, giving suggested electoral arrangements as follows:

Parish	Electors 2015	Cllrs	Ward	Electors 2015	Cllrs
Option 2	No change				
Little Canfield	713	9	Priors Green Village	522 191	6 3
Takeley	3028	13			

The Democratic and Electoral Services Officer said the consultation would include information on consequential electoral arrangements. It would also include detailed information in the form of pamphlets setting out the implications of each option, to be kept as simple as possible. Members asked that the draft consultation documents be sent to them for final comments.

Members agreed to the deferral until 2012 of parish council elections in Little Canfield and Takeley. It was agreed to consult residents on the preferred option of no change to the boundaries of Takeley and Little Canfield, giving the opportunity for those responding to show other options in their order of preference.

EAWG8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager reminded Members of the date of the next meeting, 25 October 2010, at which the Working Group would be invited to make a recommendation to the Finance and Administration Committee on Returning Officers' fees. Members agreed this business should be dealt with directly by means of a report to Committee.

The next meeting would also address the Community Governance Review in relation to other parishes, and the review of two polling stations.

The meeting ended at 12.01pm.