

HISTON and IMPINGTON PARISH COUNCILS - OPEN MEETING

Minutes of Open Meeting held Recreation Centre, New Road, Impington,
Thursday 22nd September 2011 8 p.m.

Present: Councillors Denis Payne, Brian Ing, Hooda Abdullah (Impington) Derek Marston, Edd Stonham, Rob Plumbly (Histon) Max Parish, Neil Davies (Histon and Impington)

Angela Young, Lynda Marsh, Parish Council staff

2 non-residents

15 residents

Denis Payne introduced members of the working party and explained the informal purpose of the meeting to answer any questions arising from the recent consultation with residents to gauge public opinion on whether the 2 Parish Councils should join. Further, the Councils would be expecting to take a decision on the way forward at concurrent parish meetings to be held 14 October

Responses to the consultation had been largely positive but a small number disagreed or had some uncertainties

Questions were taken:

Huw Jones, Histon Why not join the villages as well as the Parish Councils? Max Parish outlined discussions at Council on this matter and detailed routes for both grouping under the Local Govt Act 1972 and forming joint parishes under the 2007 Communities Act. Denis Payne outlined reasons for grouping the Councils only:

- Faster process, with Parish Council elections due May 2012
- Costs
- Under the control of the parish, not SCDC
- Significant feedback says the villages want to retain identity

A vote saying yes to a Grouping Order being requested after the meeting 14 October should allow for a single Parish Council to be in place with only 1 set of elections

Neil Davies added that remaining as 2 separate villages has its benefits, Brian Ing outlined some difficult issues surrounding current arrangements for shared ownership, responsibility etc.

Huw Jones summarised it seemed a pragmatic solution and perhaps would not rule out "merger" in the future

Phillip Whitehead, Histon queried the financial implications of grouping and any rules from "higher authority". Denis Payne, Brian Ing and Max Parish outlined agreements in place for property/loans and cross payment arrangements at present and confirmed automatic transfers would take place as part of the grouping order. Also confirmed that Parish Council precept requests were not subject to any capping by the District Council

Denis and Brian added that the higher authority was the electorate of Histon and Impington and the Localism Bill was a mechanism for referendum on increases in precept levels. There had not been a contested election for many years. All meetings are open to the public with a time set aside for questions at the start

Phillip Whitehead continued to query if any differences would be introduced were a single parish to be formed. Denis agreed there might be changes as part of any Community Governance Review, which could at any time look at splitting off Kings Meadows from a merged parish of Histon and Impington.

This would have an effect of raising precept for the remaining parish. The proposed development at NIAB 1 and 2 were also discussed

Phillip then asked if there was a mechanism to vote by proxy or indicate support or otherwise if unable to attend the meeting on 14 October. Written comments would be welcomed, but proxy votes were not possible. Publicity for the meeting was important

Barbara Parr, Histon asked about the parish meeting. There would be 2 separate parish meetings, running concurrently on the same night. Quorum would be 3, vote would not necessarily be counted if a majority was clear either by hand or vocal means

Berry Underwood-Day, Histon felt the public should be made more aware of what the parish council do and what money is spent on.. It was generally felt that this information was widely given in publications

Mike Mason, Cottenham asked whether votes would be validated, and how the parish councils proposed to make a decision in the event of a poor turnout. Residents would be checked against the electoral roll. Councils had the consultation results as back up information

Mike continued to outline, as District Councillor for the 2 villages, the risks of not proceeding to grouping now.

Various comments followed on pros:

- No distractions surrounding money transfers etc
- Will enable the councils to focus on more things of benefit to the community
- May reduce danger of each Council cancelling out the other when responding differently to consultations at SCDC etc
- Impington parish council particularly was failing to attract residents onto the Council, currently 3 short of numbers, plus 2 Histon residents on both entities. It was at great risk of becoming a Council with too much to do and not enough people to do it
- A combined Council (say 19 instead of current 26) may be easier to ensure we carry out things recognised as needed

Cons:

- Risk of losing the name Impington if joining the 2 Parish Councils. This fear has been expressed by some, the Council recognise it is a concern and would be working always to preserve both village names. It is up to the community to also ensure that does not happen

Max Parish outlined some things that **both** Councils had recently worked on, separately or together, but all of which affected residents from both villages, in essence from the community of Histon and Impington

- A14 cycle crossing
- Cycleway B1049
- A14 noise
- Playground on the Green
- Brook renovation
- NIAB
- Northstowe
- Merrington Place development and traffic implications
- SiCA site, Villa Road
- Guided Bus
- Traffic lights at the Station
- The Station Building
- Minerals and Waste Plan
- Older Persons Co-Ordinator – both had contributed towards the costs of this new post
- Recreation ground

- Grass cutting of verges and open areas
- Insurances
- Audit fees
- Burial ground
- Youth matters
- Homefield Park

These few examples of a very long list he felt to show why the Councils need to rationalise their approach

Phillip Whitehead, Histon asked about connections with other Councils, i.e. possible arrangements to work with other neighbouring villages on grass contracts etc.

Denis Payne advised the 2 Councils already work with others for instance on approaches regarding Northstowe and possible improvements to the A14 (Joint Action Group with Cottenham, Orchard Park, Oakington, Longstanton etc.) It as agreed that the Localism Bill does offer chances for clusters of service providers, but this would be easier if Histon and Impington were grouped as parish councils. There were, however, no plans to take this any further

Mike Mason, Cottenham queried the position with Public Open Space, Community Facilities and Public Art Section 106 payments received and due on development in the villages. The Section 106 payments could, in any case, be used in either village for community gain. These would need to be spent within 10 years of receipt and high levels were expected over the next few years

Derek Marston, Histon questioned the reasons for lack of interest of residents to become Parish Councillors, particularly for Impington. No real answer, but acknowledgement that Impington Parish Council were certainly “punching above their weight” despite depletion in numbers. Some sympathy expressed for office team and duplication current required in so many aspects of Council work, also for County and District Councillors and all others who currently attended 2 meetings often discussing the same matters, and the delays involved with so many decisions

A final question was raised over whether the proposed Grouped Council should be warded and how that would work. Some concern was voiced whether sufficient candidates would come forward under a warded system

Closed 9.15 p.m.