

Symondsbury Parish Council (*Working with and for the Community*)

Submission to the Community Governance Review – October 2021

1.0 Introduction:

This submission sets out the position of Symondsbury Parish Council for community governance following the last review which was made in 1986. If there are to be any changes to the governance and particularly the boundaries it is critical for a successful, sustainable Parish future to maintain the essence of successful cohesion of the community. This is and will be delivered by running the community well with inclusive and effective participation, representation and leadership through a diverse and knowledgeable Council. Notwithstanding the viability of a no change option, there has been consultation and communication with our neighbouring Parishes to arrive at this submission. The submission identifies one proposal for consideration, containing a number of simple elements.

Accepting the current successful performance of Symondsbury Parish Council, it contends that whilst assuring strong governance with attendant electoral arrangements will remain in place, there are appropriate reasons to consider a number of changes to the boundary. Symondsbury Parish Council has consulted with its community through its website, emails and a public meeting where the issues of boundary change were discussed. A separate meeting of the West Cliff House Owners Association was also undertaken with members of the Parish Council present. In addition, Symondsbury has been in consultation with its Parish neighbours, particularly Bridport Town Council, to arrive at the most appropriate solution to ensure the governance and vibrancy of the overall area is maintained and the rural identity of Symondsbury is preserved. The proposal from Symondsbury for boundary change has been agreed with and has the support of Bridport Town Council.

Symondsbury is one of the largest parishes in West Dorset, bounded by the Marshwood Vale to the north-west and the World Heritage Jurassic Coast to the south. In the north it is adjacent to Netherbury and then runs to the coast between Chideock on the west and Allington and Bridport on the east. The River Simene, its source just north of the Parish, meanders through the village of Symondsbury and meets with the River Brit to continue its journey to the sea at West Bay. The Parish is also within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The rural Parish of Symondsbury is centred around Symondsbury village and has a number of other village communities including Eype and Broadoak, together with smaller distinct communities including West Cliff on the coast. The overall population currently is approximately 1,013 which will be increased significantly over the next seven to eight years by the construction of up to 930 houses within the Parish at its eastern boundary with Bridport at Vearse Farm (now called Foundry Lea). This proposal is made with the understanding that some of this new large development at Vearse Farm, given its proximity to the boundary of Bridport Town, may become part of Bridport together with the areas of Pine View and Magdalen Lane (currently within Symondsbury Parish). However, it must be clearly stated that given the new development will be controlled and serviced by a management company and with the strong existing and proposed governance of Symondsbury Parish, the overall areas of Vearse Farm, Pine View and Magdalen Lane could easily remain within the governance of Symondsbury Parish.

2.0. Service Provision:

It is clear from the strength of the Parish Council in representing this rural community and delivering services, that Symondsburry has the capacity for modern progressive governance of the Parish. The Parish Council assures effective engagement with the community at neighbourhood level through strategic and inclusive leadership delivering a sustainable cohesive community. It currently has the financial support provided by the population to assure overall benefit for the community and where necessary contribute to services or facilities outside of its boundary. As examples the Parish provides services and financial support to the community in areas such as allotments, community and village halls, maintenance of footpaths and verges, housing trusts and provides planning considerations together with other advice for parishioners. Specific examples are:

- The allotments in Pine View owned by Symondsburry and the allotments at West Road which are rented from Dorset Council at £225 per annum are both serviced by Symondsburry.
- In the financial year 20/21 Symondsburry has given £5,000 to Bridport Leisure Centre as a grant, responding to the financial challenge arising from Covid.
- Symondsburry has donated £750 each year to Symondsburry PCC towards upkeep costs of the churchyards in Symondsburry and Eype.
- Symondsburry has donated to Bridport Citizens Advice Bureau and Axe Valley Ring and Ride.
- Symondsburry pays Bridport Town Council £2,200pa for the lengthsman's services for upkeep of footpaths and noticeboards.
- Symondsburry is promoting the installation of defibrillators throughout the Parish, and in some cases contributing to the cost.
- Symondsburry has contributed towards repairs of Broadoak Village Hall.

It is clear that to maintain the level of service and improve in future years the population of Symondsburry Parish must continue to be viable and it is suggested that it is likely to grow by organic means.

3.0. Identity:

Symondsburry Parish has a strong rural identity and in the most part does not share the same characteristics as Bridport and the other surrounding parishes. The main settlements of Symondsburry village, as well as Eype and Broadoak, are rural in nature and separated by large expanses of open green land from the nearby rural urban town of Bridport. The nature of these green rural areas is that it prevents coalescence of urban sprawl and delivers a rural environment in all its aspects for residents and visitors to enjoy. The Symondsburry local community has a particularly strong sense of local identity as a consequence of its rural identity and to some extent its affiliation with the Symondsburry Estate. Within this identity is strong community cohesion which benefits from the services provided by the Parish Council.

4.0. Effective and Convenient Local Government:

Symondsburry has provided and will continue to provide effective and convenient local government in its community representation and local administration. The Parish Council does not find it difficult to recruit a full complement of councillors who are drawn from across the socio-demographic profile of the Parish and provide knowledgeable and enthusiastic governance in all areas. The creation of a Unitary Dorset Council is recognised as providing a streamlining of the overall governance process,

which has however yet to be proven. The nature of this change can put additional pressure on local area governance. The diverse make-up of Symondsburry Parish Council provides for a strong platform to withstand any additional pressure. The key issue is the relationship between the Unitary Authority and the local governance of Symondsburry and how this is operated within the legal statutory requirements. Symondsburry Parish Council is well placed to provide viable, convenient local government and services for local people, giving them a voice in dealings with the Unitary Authority.

5.0. Community Cohesion:

Symondsburry is a rural Parish with a strong sense of community spirit and sustainable cohesion. The backgrounds of the Symondsburry population are extremely varied in all aspects, both those born and bred in the area and people who have moved into the area over the years. This leads to a position where there are very few barriers to social, economic, environmental and community cohesion. The Symondsburry Estate and its management have been a contributory factor in the balance of this strong community, working with a strong, inclusive and responsive Parish Council which is welcoming and supportive of positive change for the benefit of the area.

6.0. Specific Boundary Considerations:

Notwithstanding the position that there may be no change to the current governance and boundary positions, as well as understanding the proposals of Bridport Town Council, Symondsburry Parish Council does see the merit of some boundary amendments for the benefit of the greater area. The biggest element that may affect Symondsburry in any proposed change is the large mixed-use development at Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea) which will be entering the construction phase in the near future. The whole development could remain in Symondsburry, however in consultation with Bridport Town Council and in consideration of the above, the attached plans illustrate possible boundary changes for consideration.

- a. West Cliff becomes part of Bridport. A recent meeting of the House Owners Association for this private estate discussed the merits of staying in Symondsburry Parish or moving into Bridport. The voting of those present was inconclusive. The only vehicular access to West Cliff is through Bridport and as such it is felt by the Parish Council that that on balance West Cliff could and probably should become part of Bridport. See attached West Cliff Plan attached which has been agreed with Bridport Town Council. (Plan kindly provided by Bridport)
- b. Watton Park remains within Symondsburry. Watton Park is part of the green rural area that connects with the more urbanised form of Bridport. The Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan and Local Plan confirm that these areas should remain green and rural and not allow coalescence of development to occur. It is proposed that there is no change to the boundary in this area. See attached general Symondsburry Plan which shows Watton Park unchanged which has been agreed with Bridport Town Council.
- c. The denser residential development of Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea) becomes part of Bridport Town, together with Pine View, the development land between Vearse Farm and Pine View, and the northern part of Magdalen Lane. In looking at the Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea) plan attached you will see that the proposed boundary leaves Broad Lane/Skilling Hill at the junction with Dark Lane. The intention is to maintain the farmland and open space to the south and west of the old Vearse Farm complex, including the Vearse Farm complex itself. The boundary position will allow some of the less dense housing, school, allotments, care home, retail centre and employment land to remain in Symondsburry. As in b. above this allows the rural green areas to interface responsively with the new and existing urbanisation allowing accessibility for both new and existing residents as well as visitors. In addition, the proposed numbers of housing stock to be delivered helps Symondsburry by replacing

electoral numbers lost by the transition of Pine View and West Cliff into Bridport. See attached Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea) plan which shows the new boundary agreed with Bridport Town Council. (Plan kindly provided by Bridport)

- d. In the northern part of the Vearse Farm development the proposed boundary turns east and follows the river until it reaches the meadows and allotments behind Edwards Close. The boundary line then goes north, around the allotments to route between Edwards Close and the Bridport Medical Centre across West Road and continues north until it hits the base of Allington Hill. The boundary then follows the preferred route of Bridport Town Council until it skirts around Pymore. The remaining rural part of Allington Parish would then become part of Symondsburry. See attached Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea) and Pymore plan which shows the new boundary agreed with Bridport Town Council. (Plan kindly provided by Bridport)
- e. A small area of Chideock Parish and a small part of Atrim in the north is included in the boundary change. See attached general Symondsburry plan identifying the boundary changes to include part of Atrim and Chideock.

There are consequences of these proposed changes especially to household numbers affecting electoral voting and precept. The following is a guide to the outcome bearing in mind the phased completion of Vearse Farm.

1. Symondsburry will lose West Cliff to Bridport, apart from Cowleaze Farm and West Cliff Farm. 126 households will go, and 188 electors.
2. Symondsburry will lose Pine View and Magdalen Lane to Bridport. 90 households will go, and 157 electors.
3. Symondsburry will gain all the properties in Allington Parish south of Allington Hill. 118 households will come to Symondsburry, with 202 electors.
4. Symondsburry will gain properties from Bridport south of West Road from the existing parish boundary between Allington and Bridport to (and including) Edwards Close, and north of West Road from the existing parish boundary between Allington and Bridport from the junction of Edwards Close and West Road up to Allington Hill (primarily De Legh Grove). 25 households will come to Symondsburry, with 43 electors.

The net effect will therefore be for Symondsburry Parish to lose 73 households, and 100 electors.

Symondsburry Parish currently has 605 households, and 899 electors. The Parish can therefore reasonably expect its precept income (at the current rate) to decrease by about 12%, and the total number of electors to reduce by about 11%.

When Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea) is built, the houses along West Road and those in the less dense housing area furthest away from Bridport will sit in Symondsburry Parish. It is likely that over the seven year build the resultant development in Symondsburry will be approximately 120 households with about 240 electors. In overall terms it is likely that in the fullness of time the newly developed houses will increase the total number of households in Symondsburry Parish up to about 650, and the number of electors to a little over 1,000.

In simplistic terms and in the short term the Symondsburry Parish precept will need to be increased by approximately 12% to take account of the initial decline in household numbers and allow the current successful provision of Symondsburry Parish Council services to continue. In later years the

completion of new houses in Vearse Farm/Foundry Lea should provide additional precept income to maintain and develop services.

7.0 Conclusion:

Symondsbury Parish has carefully considered the issues, consulted with its community and, taking account of the requirements of neighbouring Parishes, produced proposals for the healthy governance of the Parish together with community cohesion for the next 15-25 years. The majority of the views expressed to the Parish Council, either by email or at the public meeting, indicated that residents favoured a proposal meeting the following objectives:

- 1) To maintain and improve the effective, convenient, representative and appropriate governance currently provided by the Parish Council for the Parish, with a purpose and voice that can be heard.
- 2) To promote and improve the health and cohesive identity of the Parish as a rural community, delivering sustainable services and requirements of the community whilst providing a positive interface with neighbouring Parishes.
- 3) To ensure the fair and appropriate financial income necessary to allow the Parish to provide the services required for all aspects of the community, including welcoming and catering for new members of the community and visitors. This will be achieved either by maintaining the current situation without change, or by making the proposed boundary changes, increasing the precept by about 12%, and allowing organic growth to continue with the benefit of Vearse Farm (Foundry Lea).
- 4) To provide appropriate assistance through grant or subsidy to services that the Symondsbury community may benefit from which are located in neighbouring Parishes.
- 5) To suggest adjustments to the Parish boundaries to support the operation of the Parish Council in delivering services to and representing the community in association with progressive methods of governance.

In consideration of the above items, the boundary changes identified on the attached plans allow the denser residential element of Vearse Farm (apart from the less dense west section) and the existing Pine View area to move into Bridport. This maintains a rural identity with linking green space up to the A35. It maintains Watton Park within Symondsbury but does let West Cliff go to Bridport. Pymore itself goes from Allington to Bridport and the remaining part of Allington Parish goes to Symondsbury. A small element of Atrim goes to Symondsbury as well as a small element of North Chideock to resolve boundary anomalies. This approach is in line with the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan and reduces the risk of coalescence with rural urban Bridport, thereby helping to maintain a rural identity as well as providing appropriate income to maintain services. It must be remembered that the presence of geographical boundaries is acknowledged, but cultural and identity boundaries are far more important.

As such Dorset Council are requested to consider maintaining the boundaries as they exist or support the above simple changes. If change is required, the above changes, made in consultation with Bridport Town Council, are promoted as positive moves to conserve and promote the rural identity of Symondsbury Parish within the AONB and Heritage Coast, to continue to provide for community cohesion through effective governance going forward and to promote all that delivers vibrancy to this local area of West Dorset. The changes are relevant, appropriate and fit well with neighbouring Parishes in the promotion of effective and convenient local government, linking with the new Unitary Authority.