

## Dorset Community Governance Review (CGR) Spring 2022 Consultation Bradpole Parish Council (BPC) Response

### SUMMARY

This Community Governance Review has been a disappointing experience based on 2007 legislation. To make alterations such as those set out without the express consent of affected residents is not the democratic way forward and does not respect the rights of those residents.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) had recognised this in 2017 when they called for reforms to CGR to incorporate a community right of appeal and the use of referendums.

BPC has received no explanation from Dorset Council as to why its proposals were considered unacceptable. It is a backward step to change arrangements that work well, as [acknowledged by our residents](#).

We would therefore request that Dorset Councillors revisit the balanced [proposal](#) submitted by Bradpole Parish Council in October 2021 which was not dissimilar to the contemporaneously submitted Bridport Town Council Option 2 in which the Town Council stated: **“The distinct identities of Bradpole, Bothenhampton and Walditch are maintained by the retention of their respective parish councils.”**

### COMMENT

Bradpole Councillors were saddened to learn at the February 15<sup>th</sup> Dorset Council Meeting of the recommendation to support CGR Option 1 presented by Bridport Town Council to abolish the Parish of Bradpole without the clear consent of the residents of the Civil Parish of Bradpole.

It was stated in the recommendation to Dorset Councillors that: **“The Working Group also invited all the parishes affected to address the Working Group on 20 December 2021 and 26 January 2022 to make their case for or against the proposals by Bridport Town Council, and in respect of any other changes to community governance arrangements they might wish to propose.”**

**This was not the case.** BPC had been invited, in a 23<sup>rd</sup> November Email from Legal & Democratic Services, as follows: **“The Community Governance Review Working Group met recently to consider the submissions received as part of the initial submission consultation phase of the Review.**

**The Working Group will be undertaking a site visit to Bridport and the surrounding parishes, and would also like to invite your Council to make a 10 minute verbal presentation to them in respect of your submission.”**

There was no mention of responding to a submission by Bridport Town Council, nor indeed to that of any other parish.

We now take the opportunity hereunder to comment upon the Bridport Town Council proposal.

### **The Bridport Town Proposal recommended to Dorset Councillors**

Bridport Town Council’s various documents have indicated that the “One Council For Bridport” proposal would involve the proposed Council being divided into 5 wards with a total of 20 Councillors and each Ward having its own Ward Committee and budget thus “preserving the identity & character of each Parish”.

No evidence has been produced of other towns where this has been achieved and in the case of the existing Town Council, which is divided into two wards, there appears to be no separate ward committee structure nor ward funding.

There are 3 Dorset Ward Councillors who represent the town of Bridport and surrounding parishes who will have been elected by residents of Bradpole Parish amongst others. However since all 3 are also members of Bridport Town Council their interests in this matter are conflicted and none has shown interest in representing the parish electors, who voted for them, in preserving the Parish Council.

Dorset Ward Councillors are invited to Parish Council meetings and whilst they have, this year, adopted a rota-system to attend they rarely remain for the whole meeting to fully understand Parish business.

They are also consultees in parish-based planning applications but generally choose not to engage.

Consequently Bradpole Parish Councillors have little confidence that any warding arrangements will adequately replace the existing parish arrangements that work well in the interests of residents.

During the 3-month Consultation in 2021 BPC had requested further discussions with the Town Council on a number of occasions but these were not forthcoming despite negotiations being held between the Town Council and Symondsbury Parish Council which the Town Council was not seeking to annex.

The Town Council's preferred option 1, now supported by Dorset Council, differed from what we had been told by Town Council representatives in the only meeting that was held between us July 2021 when it was stated by Town representatives that "we do not wish to take over swathes of the outlying parishes" and "we need to increase our income to do what we want to do"

Bradpole Councillors noted that the single question campaign flyer distributed by Bridport Town Council to its 3000+ households, but not beyond, resulted in just 126 responses in support.

Being non-representative of the wider area and with a possibility of double-counting this was quite rightly set aside by Dorset Council from the genuine consultation responses.

Despite this the figure is, and has been, incorporated in local media releases indicating that 73% of responses from the wider area were in favour of the Town Council's proposals.

A more accurate figure across the wider local area is closer to 52% in favour and 48% against which directly reflects the population spread between Parishes/Town Council across the wider area.

In short those living within the current Bridport boundary were in favour and those living in the parishes were against.

Bradpole Councillors have always adopted a quite different approach by encouraging residents to respond to the consultation directly by providing their own views and not those of Parish/Town Councillors.

This approach has continued through this 2<sup>nd</sup> Consultation.

### **Bradpole Parish Council submission**

We do not propose to repeat here the details of our [2021 submission](#) but it is worth stating that, apart from regular meetings etc., Bradpole Councillors and Clerks continue to engage personally in a "hands on" relationship with residents on a number of parish issues, as indicated in our 2021 submission and the likelihood is that this engagement will fall away in a "One Council for Bridport" resulting in higher costs as the current cost-free input from volunteer Bradpole Parish Councillors will have been forfeited to be replaced by officers' costs.

At the time of the December presentation the results of the earlier consultation had not been made available to BPC although, presumably, the DC Working Group were aware of the responses from residents.

BPC subsequently learned of these when they were published earlier this year.

Whilst the level of public responses across the Dorset Council area was relatively low and despite consultation process issues in recording which actual parish consultees were referring to (a subject of an Email between BPC and Legal & Democratic Services during the consultation) we were able to establish that some [40+ responses came from Bradpole Civil Parish residents](#) who were overwhelmingly (c.90%) in support of retaining the Parish Council. These public responses appear to have been ignored despite this comment at the 15<sup>th</sup> Feb Dorset Council meeting:

**"There is no point in holding a consultation if we don't listen to what is said."**