

Community Governance Review of Buntingford Town Council

Report on responses to initial consultation

Essential Reference Paper B(ii)

Documents attached:-

- M5 - Copy of response from Cottered and Throcking Parish Council
- M7 - Copy of response from Cottered Village Hall Trust
- M8 - Copy of response from A Safer A507 Group
- M9 - Copy of response from Cottered Village Appreciation Society
- M10 – Copy of response from local resident

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COTTERED and THROCKING PARISH COUNCIL

Community Governance Review of Buntingford Town Council

Initial Submission by Cottered and Throcking Parish Council

To East Hertfordshire District Council

March/April 2018

Summary

- Cottered and Throcking Parish Council (CTPC) draws the attention of East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) to the possibility that its review decision may be affected to the disadvantage of residents in these two parishes by shortcomings in its procedure, timetable and documentation. (1)
- Thoughtful examination of the present and proposed positions of boundaries reveals that their present positions will remain appropriate. They will continue to allow best governance and servicing of growing local communities, at the same time as reflecting their history and preferences. (2)
- The provision of services and facilities for residents in these parishes, opportunities to involve them in local activities and effective democratic representation are best assured by leaving the boundaries as they are. The wishes of local residents are important, especially residents in Area A, and CTPC has taken practical steps to find out what those wishes are. (3 and 4)
- CTPC has been asked to report the views of some local organisations and does so. It also refers to local organisations which have made their views known direct to EHDC. It points out that they deal with relevant areas of special expertise which CTPC has not attempted address in this submission. It commends those views to EHDC, as also the views of individual local residents. (5)
- Current community governance reviews and review decisions elsewhere are explained and considered, circumstances distinguished from those of the Buntingford review and precedents found for a Buntingford review decision that the boundaries should remain in their present positions. (6)
- CTPC concludes that it has made a strong and well-founded case here and urges EHDC to decide that the boundaries should remain where they are. (7)

1. Context, presentation, motivation, preliminary procedure and onus

1.1 In making its submission Cottered and Throcking Parish Council (CTPC) has had regard to guidance on community governance reviews published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and to the terms of reference published by East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) for this particular review.

1.2 CTPC believes that, in attributing motivation and weight to submissions made during the review, EHDC should remain aware at all times that –

(a) it is carrying out this review in response to a request from Buntingford Town Council (BTC), not in response to a petition by the local electorate;

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(b) as far as CTPC is aware BTC's request did not stem from significant (or perhaps any) canvassing of the local electorate;

(c) CTPC was neither consulted by BTC about its intention to make this request nor given prior notice of it, although at that time CTPC and BTC (and others) were cooperating closely in producing a shared neighbourhood plan (BCANP); whilst such consultation and prior notice are not strictly required they may well have helped to facilitate governance arrangements acceptable and beneficial to all councils now involved in this review;

(d) EHDC was not under any obligation to carry out this review and indeed CTPC wrote to EHDC pointing out that the review was inappropriate and unnecessary and explaining why;

(e) CTPC notes that the process now underway is described as a review of **Buntingford Town Council** and believes that this description is misleading and belies the real focus of the review solely on realignment of two discrete lengths of Buntingford's town boundary, in the first case with Cottered and Throcking parishes and in the second case with Aspenden parish, patently to bring specific development sites within the town boundary; good, honest, informative and realistic practice in these and similar circumstances – as adopted in recent cases by St. Edmundsbury District Council for instance – is rather to name and headline the site and the parishes affected;

(f) CTPC notes that the Redrow residential development site within Area A and thus currently in CTP is named "**Bunt3**" in local planning policy documents;

(g) it seems to CTPC that the factors set out in (a) to (f) above may be symptoms of an established but misconceived assumption that Area A is really already or should be or is bound to become part of **Buntingford**;

(h) bearing in mind that a representative of CTPC met officers of EHDC in June 2017 to discuss the impending review but then, in spite of making enquiries, CTPC heard nothing at all about timetable or procedure until January 2018 (and that was via the district councillor representing **Buntingford** rather than directly from EHDC), the time allowed for submissions is inadequate;

(i) bearing in mind also that a good many local organisations which EHDC now claims to have consulted report to CTPC that they have not been consulted, that the availability of batches of leaflets at a few central points is not an adequate substitute for delivery directly and reliably to local electors and organisations, that a significant number of residents in CTP have little or no access to the internet and that in any event EHDC's online consultation facility has malfunctioned, the time allowed for submissions is inadequate and CTPC believes the review should be abandoned or at least re-scheduled;

(j) and bearing in mind the misconceived assumption explained at (g), the fact that through its members and officers BTC might appear to benefit from a close connexion with EHDC and Hertfordshire County Council (a statutory consultee) and that the resources available to BTC in putting its case are far greater than those available to CTPC, all possible steps should be taken to avoid the electors of CTP feeling disadvantaged by the review procedure and timetable.

1.3 As far as CTPC is aware neither the published guidance nor EHDC's terms of reference stipulate where the onus lies to demonstrate that the town and parish boundaries should remain where they are or be re-aligned. That is an important failure. CTPC's view is that common sense and natural justice dictate that the boundaries should remain where they are and where they have been since well beyond living memory, unless the councils, organisations and electors proposing re-alignment make their case to a higher standard than merely "on the balance of probability".

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2. Community, geography, history, layout and mapping

2.1 Cottered and Throcking are rural parishes containing several settlements of various sizes, each with its own identity, character and some facilities and resources but all as appropriate sharing other facilities, resources and activities. Cottered is the largest village (sufficiently large to be classified Group 2 for planning purposes), whilst Throcking is distinctly smaller and there are hamlets or other nuclei of dwellings at Broadfield and Parkside. These settlements are well linked by a network of maintained roads with a range of classifications and sizes so that travel times between them are insubstantial. Parkside is immediately to the north of the new Redrow development and the other CTPC settlements between 2km and 6km to the west and south-west.

2.2 Parkside and the Redrow development are of course side by side within "Area A" as defined in the review documents.

2.3 Over centuries and still today CTP has displayed and displays changing patterns and balances of land and built development typical of rural East Hertfordshire parishes. Over time its settlements have altered in shape and size but remained distinct one from another, its inhabitants have worked and taken their leisure separately and together and as a result the parishes have a single overall but evolving character to the mutual advantage of all living and working within them.

2.4 CTPC's view is that, in the best interests of all involved, this evolution should be allowed and encouraged to continue by leaving the parish and town boundaries on their present alignments at Area A.

2.5 To the extent that geographical proximity is a proper factor in deciding how settlements should best be "parished" together, CTPC points out that the northern part of Area A is (to within rather few metres) as close to the centre of Cottered as to the A10 roundabout and residential and commercial developments at the southern gateway to Buntingford.

2.6 The extent and colouring of the map attached to the terms of reference and to the publicity leaflet for the review tend to give the false impression that Area A is an awkwardly shaped and isolated tract of land, closer to Buntingford than to anywhere else or to anything else of significance. If the map were extended westwards to include the whole of CTP (or a larger part of it) it would be clear that Area A falls naturally within a perfectly sensible and understandable layout of CTP boundaries, free from any particularly awkwardly shaped or isolated tracts. At the same time it would show that, in comparison, by a school, by playing fields and by an industrial estate, Area A, with its new housing, is effectively separated from Buntingford and especially from any other housing there.

2.7 As an addition to Buntingford, Area A would indeed be awkwardly shaped, isolated and by no means an extension of what exists. In contrast Area A, containing the hamlet of Parkside and the Redrow site and falling within an understandable and long-established parish boundary, fits perfectly with other parts of CTP and the current overall pattern of development in those parishes.

2.8 The eastern edge of Area A lies along Ermine Street as does the boundary between CTP and the Buntingford parish. This is and will remain a very clear and appropriate alignment with strong historical and visual credentials. Ermine Street (the old A10) is the Roman road from London via Lincoln to York and is understood to be exactly on its original course as it borders Area A. On site and on maps its very straightness draws attention to it and identifies it as a deliberate man-made intervention in the landscape – it is intended to be noticed not concealed. It is made all the more definite and "impermeable" by having no roads joining it (other than the private drive to Corneybury) or crossing it and by there being enclosed parkland immediately to its east, quite unlike

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any land use current or proposed in Area A or in the parts of CTP west of Area A. Conversely, the A10 Buntingford bypass is a 1980s construction along the western edge of Area A, mostly in cutting and intended to be hidden as far as possible so as not to sever the single landscape to its east and west. As a result of having roads joining and crossing it – and a main access to the Redrow site is being added to these – it would be a less definite and more permeable boundary than Ermine Street. Physically the Redrow access couples Area A to the parts of CTP to its west. On the assumption that, if re-positioned, the CTP/Buntingford boundary would follow the centre line of the bypass here, at least 50% of the traffic using that access would still be travelling in CTP immediately before or after entering or leaving the Redrow development.

2.9 The weight given to the circumstances explained in 2.1-2.8 (above) might perhaps be reduced a little and some linkage with Buntingford emphasised if for instance all or most of the traffic to and from Parkside and the Redrow site once built and occupied is bound or likely to flow through Buntingford. This is not the case. The vast majority of vehicle movements will be via the bypass and many residents in Area 2 are likely to see and experience a good deal more of CTP than of Buntingford.

2.10 Published guidance cites the example of a single community expanding with new development across a boundary so as to leave some residents in a different parish from their immediate or near neighbours. Area A and the Redrow development within it are an entirely different case. There is no expansion across a boundary. The Redrow development is wholly within CTP, it is self contained, it does not join or even lie close to other similar existing development in Buntingford and is probably not even visible from or to such other development.

3. Community, facilities, finance and services

3.1 CTPC is aware of a suggestion that residents in Area A will benefit materially from facilities and services provided by BTC and/or in Buntingford, that Area A should therefore be taken into Buntingford and that precepts gathered from council tax payers in Area A and any New Homes Bonus payments should be available to BTC. That suggestion is misconceived.

3.2 Essential facilities and services are and will continue to be provided for residents in Area A by statutory bodies, government, HCC and EHDC and financed accordingly. Optional facilities and services are as likely to be provided for those same residents by and/or in CTP as by and/or in Buntingford. People living on the Redrow site may well prefer to use the pub, the village hall, the play area, the recreation grounds or the churches in CTP or to involve themselves in one or more of the many village clubs, societies, activities and events there. This certainly applies already to residents in Parkside. Equally, residents in any part of CTP may choose to use equivalent or other services and facilities in Buntingford. This pattern of reciprocal provision and use is established, welcome and should and will continue.

3.3 Even without the Redrow development, the population of Buntingford is already growing very rapidly and through new development now underway, permissions granted and applications in the pipeline, this trend is guaranteed to continue. It appears to CTPC that in these circumstances and to the extent that optional facilities and services are or can be provided by town and parish councils, the interests of current and future residents of Parkside and the Redrow development will be more directly and better served if Area A remains within CTP.

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3.4 This is partly a matter of focus and finance. Bearing in mind the projected number of residents in Area A in proportion to the projected number of residents in the whole of CTP and bearing in mind the additional funds likely to be available to CTPC through precept and New Homes Bonus if Area A remains within CTP, residents throughout CTP and particularly in Area A will be paid more attention and be better supported than if Area A becomes part of Buntingford.

3.5 Within Buntingford, residents of Area A will have less influence on decisions about facilities and services and on governance generally and a far smaller proportion of funds generated in Area A will be applied there.

3.6 CTPC is delighted to acknowledge a generous donation from Redrow to be used for the maintenance and improvement of the equipped play area in Cottered. This underlines the position and standing of Area A within CTP. Residents of Area A and particularly of the Redrow development are expected and welcome to use this facility. Similarly, they will be expected and welcome to use all other facilities and services in CTP and through precept and New Homes Bonus will have contributed to their provision and improvement. Redrow's press release about this donation is attached as Appendix 1.

3.7 For each existing and future household in Area A and at current levels of precept the proposed realignment of the boundary between CTP and Buntingford would immediately trigger a council tax increase of between £70+ and £100+ annually (Bands B-F). In view of the current and projected almost exponential growth of Buntingford's population it seems unlikely that much if any these amounts will be spent directly or specifically for the benefit of those who live in Parkside or on the Redrow development.

3.8 CTPC and other organisations in CTP are already examining opportunities to expand and increase facilities, services and opportunities to cater for and benefit from greater involvement of Area A residents. Cottered Village Hall, Cottered Village Appreciation Society and various sports clubs are among them, for example and CTPC understands some have made submissions direct to EHDC. The cricket, football and petanque clubs have pitches, pistes and other ancillary facilities here. In the context of this review they have asked CPTC to report that they are enthusiastic about increasing and widening membership and activities and about improving facilities to match.

4. Democracy and representation

4.1 EHDC's terms of reference for this review confirm that " ... the wishes of local inhabitants ... are therefore important considerations in this review." This is correct and consistent with published guidance. EHDC's Electoral Services department has clarified that this reference is to all inhabitants of all parishes touched by the review but that in proportion **more weight will properly be given to inhabitants of Area A.**

4.2 In May 2017 representatives of CTPC made a door-to-door visit to Parkside and gathered residents' views about the (then) impending review. The occupants of 10 dwellings (from a total of 13) were met and spoken to and signatures obtained to a pro forma request that EHDC find the boundary should remain on its present alignment. Other responses from Parkside residents were received later. CPTC's analysis of all responses indicates that 77% of Parkside households wish to remain part of CTP. Several residents felt strongly about this. A copy of the pro forma is attached as Appendix 2.

4.3 In March/April 2018 on behalf of CTPC representatives of the Cottered Village Appreciation Society carried out a similar exercise on the Redrow development. They explained the background to

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this review and invited residents to respond directly to EHDC. They have reported to CTPC that they found significant interest in this issue and that they have since had confirmation from residents of their opposition to BTC's proposal that the boundary should be re-positioned.

4.4 At the same time the Chairman of CTPC emailed a sample group of CTP residents to invite their views. The response rate was a little over 50% (this is a strikingly high rate in comparison for instance with the turnout rate in the neighbourhood plan referendum). Without exception respondents wished the boundary to remain in its present position.

4.5 CTPC points out that, given the importance and weighting of the wishes of local inhabitants (see 4.1), the fact that only a rather small proportion of the permitted dwellings are built and occupied at this moment is of the utmost importance. Clearly, this makes it simply impossible to find out, to weight and to consider the wishes of most of the local inhabitants in Area A who will in due course be most directly affected by EHDC's review decision. It is implied by published guidance and by the review's terms of reference that in such circumstances the appropriate course of action is to leave the boundary where it is. Alternatively – and there is precedent for this in review decisions elsewhere (see 6.7 below) – an appropriate decision is that the boundary shall remain unaltered but subject to review when all the dwellings are first occupied or at a specified longstop date.

4.6 The publicity leaflet issued by EHDC shows, on the basis of electors registered in February 2018, that BTC provides one councillor for every 382 electors, whilst CTPC provides one councillor for every 93 electors. CTPC has not yet seen equivalent projected electorate figures following completion and full occupation of the Redrow development. Assuming 300 additional electors in CTP at that stage and as at present 6 councillors, CTPC will then provide one councillor for every 143 electors. At the same time the number of electors per councillor in Buntingford is likely to have risen significantly as a result of other residential developments being built and occupied. Accordingly, CTPC estimates that at the time the Redrow development is completed and first fully occupied and on the assumptions that the CTP/Buntingford boundary remains in its present position and that CTPC and BTC have, as at present, six and twelve members respectively, there will be approximately four times as many electors per councillor in Buntingford as in CTP.

4.7 If EHDC takes the view that the particular character and identity of Area A deserves recognition, this may be achieved by designating an appropriately named parish ward for Area A within CTP. There is precedent for this in review decisions elsewhere (see 6.4 below). In practice, the same method of recognition could not be used if Area A were to become part of Buntingford because equitable representation would demand the designation of town wards and ward councillors for a considerable number of other established and developing areas across the whole area administered by BTC.

4.8 Whilst it is mentioned in 4.5 (above) that BTC has twelve members, CTPC respectfully points out that BTC has a long and published history of acrimony between councillors, of procedure being challenged, of resignations and of members failing to attend meetings. It is understood that BTC has only eleven members at present and has advertised for someone willing to fill a vacancy caused by a former member repeatedly and without explanation failing to attend meetings. CTPC has no such history.

4.9 It is open to EHDC as part of its review decision to direct that councils be allocated additional members. There is precedent for this in current reviews and review decisions elsewhere (see 6.2 and 6.4 below). This may be appropriate and workable for CTPC if Area A is designated a parish ward (see 4.6 above) or perhaps in any event but arguably additions to the twelve members already allocated at Buntingford would threaten to make BTC unwieldy and ineffective.

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4.10 In the circumstances set out in 4.5 to 4.9 (above), CTPC believes logic and experience are defied by supposing electors in Area A will be better represented by BTC than by CTPC.

4.11 Area A is part of the EHDC Cottered and Mundens ward. The member for this ward is experienced in representing a rural area within which are settlements of various sizes and with differing relationships with one another. Parkside is of course already part of that pattern. Parkside's neighbouring settlement, the Redrow site, will conveniently and naturally become part of the same evolving pattern albeit with its own characteristics in terms of age and size. CTPC is certain that the needs and wishes of residents in Parkside and on the Redrow site will be in closer focus and better understood at district council level if Area A remains in Cottered and Mundens ward than if it becomes part of Buntingford ward and simply another "suburb" of that town. In making this comment CTPC has assumed, although it is not spelt out in EHDC's review documents, that the ward boundary would be adjusted to follow the town/parish boundary either immediately or in due course. On a point of procedure, CTPC questions whether the terms of the current review can be well-conceived without addressing the matter of the district council ward boundary and in consequence building in the strong probability that local councils, organisations and residents will shortly be put to the very real inconvenience of a second review. Of course, if EHDC should decide that the town and parish boundaries should remain as they are, any difficulty with the district council ward boundary is avoided.

5. Other local views

5.1 CTPC understands that various organisations in its parishes have put their views to EHDC. These organisations have particular interests, responsibilities and expertise and CTPC has aimed in this submission to avoid commenting where it expects those organisations are better equipped and ready to do so.

5.2 The cricket, football and petanque clubs have asked CTPC to relay their views to EHDC. This has been done at 3.8 (above).

5.3 The Rector and/or parochial church councils at Cottered and Throcking have invited CTPC to state that they support CTPC's approach to EHDC's review. They do not believe that a recent adjustment by the Diocese of St. Albans of the ecclesiastical parish boundaries between Throcking and Buntingford has any relevance to this review. It was made in response to the application of a particular formula for the funding of diocesan operations by local church congregations. For the record, CTPC as a consultee suggested that underlying church objectives could be better achieved without the adjustment.

5.4 As and when opportunities have arisen CTPC has encouraged local residents to make their views known direct to EHDC but it is aware that considerable difficulties have been encountered with EHDC's on-line system.

6. Relevant reviews and review decisions elsewhere

6.1 CTPC acknowledges EHDC's indication that local governance reviews and review decisions elsewhere in this district and further afield may contain information which is relevant and helpful to CTPC in putting its case and to EHDC in carrying out its review and making its decision.

6.2 Current review – EHDC – Gilston and Eastwick (GE)

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6.2.1 ... at request of GE parish council ... increase number of councillors from six to seven following completion of Terlings Park development and approx. doubling of GE parish population from 331 to 661 ...

6.2.2 CTPC note – close parallels to Buntingford review which involves significant new development and similar changes in existing and projected parish populations.

6.3 Current review – EHDC – Bishops Stortford (BS)

6.3.1 ... at request of BS town council ... incorporate in BS development extension south of town and crossing current town/parish boundary ... re-draw to match existing district ward boundary ...

6.3.2 CTPC note - differs significantly from Buntingford review which involves **no cross-boundary development** and **no matching** to existing district ward boundary.

6.4 Review decision – St. Edmundsbury DC – Great Barton Parish (GBP) and Bury St. Edmunds Parish (BSEP)

6.4.1 ... North-East Bury St. Edmunds Vision 2031 Growth Site in GBP... separated from most of GBP in terms of main village, population and area by A143 main road ... small settlement of Cattishall close to development site ... Cattishall electors felt strongly part of GBP ... GBP council supported ... reasons include “... ***it provides parish boundaries to reflect the identities and interests of local residents (current and future) and offers them more effective and convenient local government (Great Barton felt that being an integrated part of their Parish would allow the new community to develop with strong and focused democratic representation and reflect shared interests and needs with the rest of the Parish (which already has several distinct but strongly connected communities ie village, Cattishall and East Barton. The Parish Council also felt that this option would provide the new residents the chance to develop their own community identity and local services while development is taking place and then decide their own future at a later CGR after building is complete ...***” ... GBP to be divided into Severalls ward (including growth site and Cattishall) and North ward (bulk of parish north of A413) ... two additional councillors for Severalls ward to join nine for North ward ...

6.4.2 CTPC note - close parallels to Buntingford review ... **separation by main road (A143 = A10 Buntingford bypass)** ... **several distinct but strongly connected communities** (Gt. Barton, East Barton, Cattishall = Cottered, Throcking, Broadfield, Parkside) ... **small settlement close to development site** (Cattishall = Parkside) ... of three reasons for decision, barrier effect of railway on south boundary of Severalls ward probably relatively unimportant; clear, straight and long-established alignment as mapped (= Ermine Street) but in visual/physical, loyalty and movement terms reduced by bridges, level crossing and cuttings and continuing access to growth area from BSEP across railway ... main access to new development from main road rather than from existing developments (A143= A10 Buntingford bypass).

6.5 Review decision – St. Edmundsbury DC - North-West Bury St. Edmunds Vision 2031 Growth Site – Fornham All Saints Parish (FASP) and BSEP

6.5.1 ... incorporate in BSEP - direct access to growth site from existing housing development ... principle supported by all respondents including FASP...

6.5.2 CTPC note – differs significantly from Buntingford review in being direct extension and supported by all respondents including FASP.

6.6 Review decision – St. Edmundsbury DC - West Bury St. Edmunds Vision 2031 Growth Site – BSEP and Westley PC

6.6.1 ... Incorporate in BSEP ...

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6.6.2 CTPC note - differs significantly from Buntingford review... direct extension of and access between existing and new development ... no response from Westley PC.

6.7 Review decision – St. Edmundsbury DC -Strategic sites Moreton Hill etc – BSEP and adjoining parishes

6.7.1 ... Re-review in 2021 or when majority of residential properties are first occupied ...

6.7.2 CTPC note – CTPC would prefer the Buntingford review decision not to require re-review in the short or medium term but accepts that effective governance and democracy may be served by a decision now to leave boundaries unchanged and to re-review in due course.

6.8 Review decision South Cambs DC – Willingham Parish Council and Over Parish Council

6.8.1 ... uneven division of open land and farm and commercial premises along route between main built areas of two villages ... difficulties with planning decisions, postal deliveries etc ... historic boundary (dating from 1618) ... strong opposing views evenly balanced ... decision to leave boundary unchanged ...

6.8.2 CTPC note – advantages must be very clear before a historic boundary (= Ermine Street) is re-aligned in spite of clear and substantial local opposition.

7. Conclusion

CTPC is concerned about shortcomings in the procedure and timetable for this review and about a possibility that EHDC's conclusion may be affected by an imbalance between the access and resources available to BTC and CTPC in making their submissions. It believes however that there is a strong case for deciding that the parish and town boundaries shared by Buntingford and CTP should remain in their present positions. It believes also that it has set out that case clearly and in detail in this submission, by reference to the published guidance, the terms of reference, the specific relevant historic, current and projected circumstances in Cottered, Throcking and Buntingford and to precedents suggested by current reviews and review decisions elsewhere.

Bearing in mind that the wishes, convenience and effective governance of local residents is acknowledged to be most important consideration, CTPC hopes EHDC will give careful thought to views put to it directly by organisations and individuals in CTP as well as to this submission. CTPC is ready to provide any additional explanation or information which may help EHDC in the next stages of this review.

CTPC urges EHDC to find upon review that no alterations shall be made in to the present positions of the civil parish and town boundaries between Buntingford and Cottered and Throcking.



NEWSROOM

SOUTH & SOUTH EAST

26TH MARCH 2018
WRITTEN BY: REDROW HOMES

Redrow contribution provides welcome boost for local play park



Play park improvements are one step closer for the parish of Cottered and Throcking following a £2,000 donation from UK housebuilder, Redrow who is delivering new homes at The Maples in Buntingford.

The children's play area sits alongside Cottered Recreation Ground in Cottered Village and is used regularly by local children. The donation from Redrow will help the parish council replace the equipment and ensure that children still have a safe place to play close to home.

Kerry McCoubrey, Sales Director at Redrow Eastern, commented: "We are committed to working with the local community and are delighted to contribute towards replacing the local play equipment. We hope that the children enjoy playing outside on the apparatus in the summer, including some of our younger residents."

John Bull, Parish Councillor for Cottered and Throcking Parish Council, added: "Redrow's kind donation is instrumental in helping us to replace equipment and make improvements to the play park surfaces. It's so important that young people have a place to play outside and many local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain play areas. Cottered has a particularly difficult task in balancing its budget due to the extensive village greens and the 140 trees it is responsible for, all of which are within a conservation area. This donation is a good example of developers and local councils working together and supporting the local community"

Redrow is building new family homes at The Maples, where four and five bedroom homes are currently available starting from £609,995. A new phase launches in June including three new show homes. Visit www.redrow.co.uk/themaples for more information on The Maples and the surrounding area. To make an appointment with a Redrow sales consultant call 01763 722086.

Media Contacts

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Cottered Village Hall Trust

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Electoral Services Officer

East Herts Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8EQ

East Herts Council
Customer Services

05 APR 2018

Received

4th April 2018

Dear Mr Williams

Ref: Community Governance Review Buntingford Town Council

Cottered Village Hall Trust wishes to register an objection to then above proposed review. We are aware that there have been other significant objections on a number of very valid grounds. Our specific objection is that Buntingford Town Council application is made purely for financial reasons as a way to claim the significant New Home Bonus that may be due from the Redrow housing development. Study of the maps does not support the claim. In fact wit would make for a most peculiar extension to Buntingford parish.

This estate is within the borders of Cottered Parish and the monies available should be and could be put to extremely beneficial use within this parish.

Our own claim would be for improvements and extension to our village hall, a significant asset of the community.

The hall has been very successful since its construction in 2001. So much so that it now needs major refurbishment to certain areas. The increased use by parishioners from Cottered and surrounding areas including Buntingford has created a need for an extension to the existing facilities with the provision of a permanent theatre style stage, more storage and meeting space for our permanent users and a significant upgrade to our kitchen facility.

Cottered Village Hall is a hub used for numerous activities both sports and leisure as well as being the permanent home of Oasis a charitable organisation teaching young adults with learning difficulties how to cope with life on their own. Funding for all items on our wish list is significant and assistance from the Parish Council would enable us to carry out the improvements to the benefit of the whole community.

We therefore respectfully request that the review finds in favour of keeping the boundary in its current position.

st management Committee

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**We urge the Council to reject the request to review the boundaries of
Cottered Parish.**

Alan Weston
Chairman
A Safer A507



20th March 2018

Supported and approved by:

- **Cottered Horticultural Society**
- **Cottered Village Appreciation Society (CVAS)**
- **Cottered Village Hall Committee**
- **Cottered Voices**
- **Friends of Cottered Church**
- **Hertfordshire Girlguiding, County Guides' Centre, Cottered**
- **Royal British Legion, Cottered Branch**

A Safer A507 Group response to the Community Governance Review 2018

General objections on change adversely affecting Community Identity and Cohesion.

Executive summary:

1. **The review is unnecessary and not broadly supported**
2. **Detrimental impact of Boundary change on Cottered Parish**
3. **Smaller communities must receive available funding to thrive**
4. **Much of the parish is a Conservation Area and home to a high proportion of Historic Listed properties. Following a recent review by the counties Conservation Officer's the following improvements could be supported from the economic boost of retaining the parish boundary as it is.**
5. **Road-related Traffic Calming to protect pedestrians and other road users**
6. **Allotments**

1. The review is unnecessary and not broadly supported

- 1.1 There is no need for a boundary review and the public has not called for it.
- 1.2 Currently Cottered parish is in one of the most deprived wards in the District and changing the boundary will worsen the residents' position (Index of Deprivation, commissioned by EHDC for a 2017 *Health and Wellbeing* study).
- 1.3 Retaining the boundary and unfreezing the associated funds would assist in redressing the disadvantage experienced in the parish.
- 1.4 The request for review of the boundary of Cottered parish has not come as a result of pressure by the residents of the affected areas. It has not come about by way of a petition.
- 1.5 There is no groundswell of opinion demanding change.
- 1.6 General objections on change adversely affecting Community Identity and Cohesion.
- 1.7 The boundary in question is historic and has not been questioned until the subject of the new homes being built within Cottered parish. More specifically, the new homes bonus and the Council Tax precept that comes from those new homes have attracted acquisitive interest from Buntingford Town, who previously had not expressed an interest in the homes in Parkside.
- 1.8 Developers of the homes being built consulted with the Cottered Parish council before development commenced and a presentation was given in the Cottered Village Hall to local residents
- 1.9 The review has been triggered by Buntingford Town Council failing to recognise the benefit of the new development on the Parish of Cottered and Throcking.
- 1.10 There is no sense that the request to change the boundary, if granted will offer any plan for Cottered or Throcking.

- 1.11 Historically the residents of Parkside have benefitted from the increased level of representation offered by the parish giving a “personal” community feel to local government. Buntingford is expanding rapidly making the Town Councils ratio of residents to councillors approximately 5 times more than would be the case if the boundary is not changed and they continue to be represented by the existing Parish Council where it would be closer to 1:100 parishioners offering local government that is more accessible and personal.
- 1.12 Prior to the request for review a number of new homes had been bought and occupied in Cottered Parish. All those, up to the point of any decision to change, remain in the Parish of Cottered and in the spirit of fairness should not retrospectively be deemed to be in Buntingford.
- 1.13 Buntingford is divided from the “disputed” developments by an industrial estate, allotments and school playing fields. Road access is via the A10 and former A10 and does not require residents to enter or leave via Buntingford High Street. Indeed when planning permission was granted it was expressed that access should be created to avoid more traffic going through Buntingford High Street.
- 1.14 Buntingford Town Council’s “wish list” for the New Homes Bonus talks of pedestrianizing the high street which could lead to the estate access from the A10 becoming a bypass for traffic accessing the Wyddial side of the town which has several estates.
- 1.15 A boundary change would adversely affect the value of property on the “new development”.
- 1.16 Residents in the new development would be adversely affected by any change as in terms of the cost of services.
- 1.17 The new homes that are being built or are to be built in the Cottered parish do not straddle the existing boundary: they are geographically separated from the residential town of Buntingford.
- 1.18 These homes are not obviously part of the town of Buntingford. At best, they are satellite areas near that town connected to it by a single narrow road (Ermine Street), the limitations of which route are such that residents are likely to have the greater share of their access and egress from their homes via the junction to the A10 to the north than to travel south through Buntingford centre.
- 1.19 The published *Guidance on Community Governance Reviews* recognises the importance of parishes within sustainable communities. It speaks of neighbourhoods, cohesion, as well as the benefit of people feeling that they have a stake in society and the ability to influence decisions affecting their lives.
- 1.20 The Cottered Parish Council meets regularly, its meetings are open to and attended by residents, and minutes of its meetings are published on its website

2. Detrimental impact of Boundary change on Cottered Parish

- 2.1 The parish is included in the Local plan that details parameters for permitted development when fully adopted.
- 2.2 Changing the boundary would adversely impact the Villages in the Parish as the current development adjacent to Parkside far exceeds the planned growth of the parish.
- 2.3 Retention of the boundary would allow for the potential to increase the infrastructure of the Parish.
- 2.4 It would support and attract interest in improving the existing Public Buildings such as the thriving Village Hall that already serves the needs both of residents in the Parish and residents living in Buntingford.
- 2.5 Retaining the boundary boosts further the 20 plus societies and interest groups in the parish using either the Village Hall or the County Guides Centre based in Cottered.
- 2.6 Retaining the boundary offers the chance to reinvigorate the community and develop again community-based shops and services that have been lost in recent years.
- 2.7 The parish boundary offers an identity for residents who associate themselves as members of that community. This association is an allegiance that brings energy and life to rural living.
- 2.8 Retaining the boundary reinforces the existence of the parish as an important historic centre and enhances its character and identity.
- 2.9 Substantial numbers of new homes have not been built in the Cottered parish for some years, so to snatch away a new homes bonus that the parish had justly expected to receive and also to reduce the number of homes in the parish (and with it their Council Tax precept) would be a bitter blow to the parish that would diminish its ability to provide the services and facilities that nourish its community.
- 2.10 Substantial capital projects intended to improve the lives of residents, such as upgrading of road signs and street furniture to improve safety, may have to be abandoned.
- 2.11 The chance to create a stronger visual identity of the parish's communities would be disadvantaged by the loss of "one-off" and sustained income.
- 2.12 Buntingford has already benefited from a number of substantial new home developments within its existing boundary in recent years, with more to come.
- 2.13 Cottered parish has no other anticipated sources of revenue of a similar magnitude in the near future. Retaining the boundary offers a one-time only boon for the parish.
- 2.14 Neighbourhoods cohere around shared facilities and shared interests. Such facilities and interests are nurtured by funds and new influxes of people to carry on and reinvigorate communities.

3. Smaller communities must receive available funding to thrive

- 3.1 It costs the same to maintain a public facility such as a village hall, a sports field, or a village green in a small parish as it does in a larger one.
- 3.2 The current development in the parish spreads that cost more equably.
- 3.3 Retaining the boundary helps to ensure that facilities in the Parish will be used to their greatest efficiency in meeting the needs of the communities and developing them to meet evolving needs.
- 3.4 A smaller parish will have fewer residents and so receives less Council Tax precept making it harder to improve community facilities.
- 3.5 And so if smaller communities are to be sustainable and civic participation increase as government wishes to be the case, smaller parishes such as Cottered must receive funds when they are available or will risk withering with stagnant ageing populations and little for isolated young or old.
- 3.6 As towns get bigger, villages are at risk of becoming mere dormitories whose residents must travel by motor car to towns to access any facilities. This is destructive of small communities. And yet the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in its report *Our Shared Future* has stressed the benefits of community and as the County Council's draft Local Transport Plan seeks to reduce motor car journeys.
- 3.7 Improvement of the Village hall would support Village societies that fundraise for local charities and provide focus for community cohesion such as Cottered Voices and The Friends of Cottered Church who put on a variety of events throughout the year attracting audiences from Buntingford and neighbouring towns and settlements.

4. Much of the parish is a Conservation Area and home to a high proportion of Historic Listed properties. Following a recent review by the counties Conservation Officer's the following improvements could be supported from the economic boost of retaining the parish boundary as it is.

- 4.1 The parish has historic Churches that would benefit from civic support as one-off actions to protect civic amenity and be in line with Conservation recommendations.
- 4.2 Churchyard tree-reduction
- 4.3 Sensitive removal of Ivy historic Church walls
- 4.4 Beautifying and protecting the classic character of villages in the parish by introducing sustainable planting of disease-resistant Irish Yews.
- 4.5 Sign de-cluttering, for example at the top of Stocking Hill Lane in Cottered.
- 4.6 Repair of verges damaged by HGVs in Cottered and Throcking.
- 4.7 Upgrade of cricket pavilion area.
- 4.8 Upgrade and extension of village hall to recognise increasing use and developments supporting community groups.
- 4.9 Improved maintenance of Footpath/stiles as recommended by footpaths officer to improve access for able and disabled residents.
- 4.10 Re-seeding of parts of the village greens.

5. Road-related Traffic Calming to protect pedestrians and other road users

- 5.1 The main parish settlement is the village of Cottered with nearly 500 residents. The village unusually (to quote Hertfordshire Highways) is “quite unique” – D Tancock report to Hertfordshire Highways Cabinet Panel 2016 – being bisected by the A507 serving as rural distributor primarily between the market towns of Buntingford and Baldock.
- 5.2 This community has suffered for many years with HGV and other road users using it as a “through route” between the A1 and the A10 former Trunk Road (then on to the M11). Plans have been confirmed to impose a weight limit except for access preparatory work to begin in this financial year.
- 5.3 Currently there is no safe controlled or uncontrolled crossing although feasibility studies are under way.
- 5.4 The A road status means traffic coming from or going to Buntingford approach and leave the village at National speed limit restrictions and are suddenly faced with a 30 mile an hour section with no continuous paving or street lighting.
- 5.5 Motorists are advised to reduce their speed by signs in the village which are antiquated and largely ignored. The Police have been quoted as saying they are loath to have “speed traps” at either end of the village as its “too dangerous” to stop vehicles safely without causing a hazard.
- 5.6 We would propose that money from retaining the boundary should:
 - 5.6.1 Support Highways improving the layby at the Baldock facing end of the village to enable police enforcement to be done safely.
 - 5.6.2 Support traffic calming throughout the village.
 - 5.6.3 Support the introduction of safe crossings for children who need to cross a busy A road to catch the school bus.
 - 5.6.4 Support more modern speed signs enabled with Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR).
 - 5.6.5 5-Bar roadside gate and other “psychologically significant” indicators that motorists are entering a community with children, elderly, disabled or vulnerable people to encourage them to reduce their speed and drive more aware of hazards. The New Homes bonus would fund community safety improvements providing much needed protection for the 500 residents.
 - 5.6.6 At the Buntingford end appropriate traffic calming to improve the safe access to roads leading off the A507 to residential streets.
 - 5.6.7 Resurfacing of the village hall car park.
 - 5.6.8 Support to develop “green” resident only parking schemes adjacent to village greens and “manorial waste” land.
 - 5.6.9 Development of sensory gardens and other visual indicators that road users need to respect the community

6. Allotments

- 6.1 Currently there are not any allocated Allotment gardens available in rural settlements in the parish (Cottered did have some allotments, but they were built on in the 20th century). Retaining the boundary could finance a scheme enhancing rural life, self-sufficiency and healthy living.
- 6.2 These could be linked to learning and self-improvement schemes such as assisted cultivation for loan elders and schemes to introduce young people to horticulture (Cottered village has a thriving Horticultural Society and could support this form of initiative for instance)



COTTERED VILLAGE APPRECIATION SOCIETY

Stocking Hill Farm, Cottered, Herts SG13 8EQ

East Herts Council
Customer Services

05 APR 2018

Received

John Williams
Electoral Services Officer
East Herts Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8EQ

4th April 2018.

Dear Mr Williams

Community Governance Review. Buntingford Town Council.

We wish to register our objection to the application by Buntingford Town Council for a review of the Parish boundary between Buntingford parish and that of Cottered & Throcking

Background.

The application has been made based purely upon a desire to claim the financial benefit that will accrue from the allocation of New Home Bonus for the construction of 181 properties on the site identified in your leaflet 'Have Your Say'.

The land concerned has been in Cottered Parish for innumerable years. Since 1986, when the Buntingford by-pass was constructed, the site has remained within the Parish and has never attracted any interest from Buntingford Town Council. Now, with the prospect of a significant payment of New Homes Bonus, Buntingford has mounted this attempt at a 'land grab'.

Buntingford is already receiving and will continue to receive significant financial benefit from the construction of over 800 properties within the parish. That they should now wish to obtain more money from this attempt to redefine the boundary smacks somewhat of greed.

Cottered Parish Council gave its blessing for the development of the site several years ago. Not until planning permission was granted did Buntingford express any interest.

Interest

Cottered Village Appreciation Society is a voluntary organisation set up to promote the interests of the village and to provide support to individuals and organisations in the village. Activities include preparing the village for 'Best Village' competitions, providing labour and equipment to help keep the local areas and churchyard tidy and in good order, to raise funding in support of local groups such as Cottered Voices and The Safer A 507 Campaign and to offer assistance and advice if requested.

We object to the movement of the boundary on several points.

- The request for review has been based on purely financial grounds.
- It does not make geographic sense to carve out the area as defined in your leaflet
- The New Home Bonus would provide far greater benefits to Cottered Parish than to that of Buntingford.

COTTERED VILLAGE APPRECIATION SOCIETY

Stinking Hill Farm Cottered Herts SG9 9PX



- A change would have an adverse effect on those living on the Redrow development by way of increased council taxes and less representation per capita on the local council.
- The site does not straddle any boundary.
- There is a significantly better boundary change opportunity by bringing the area containing Freman College and the Park Farm Industrial Estate into Cottered Parish.

Cottered Benefits

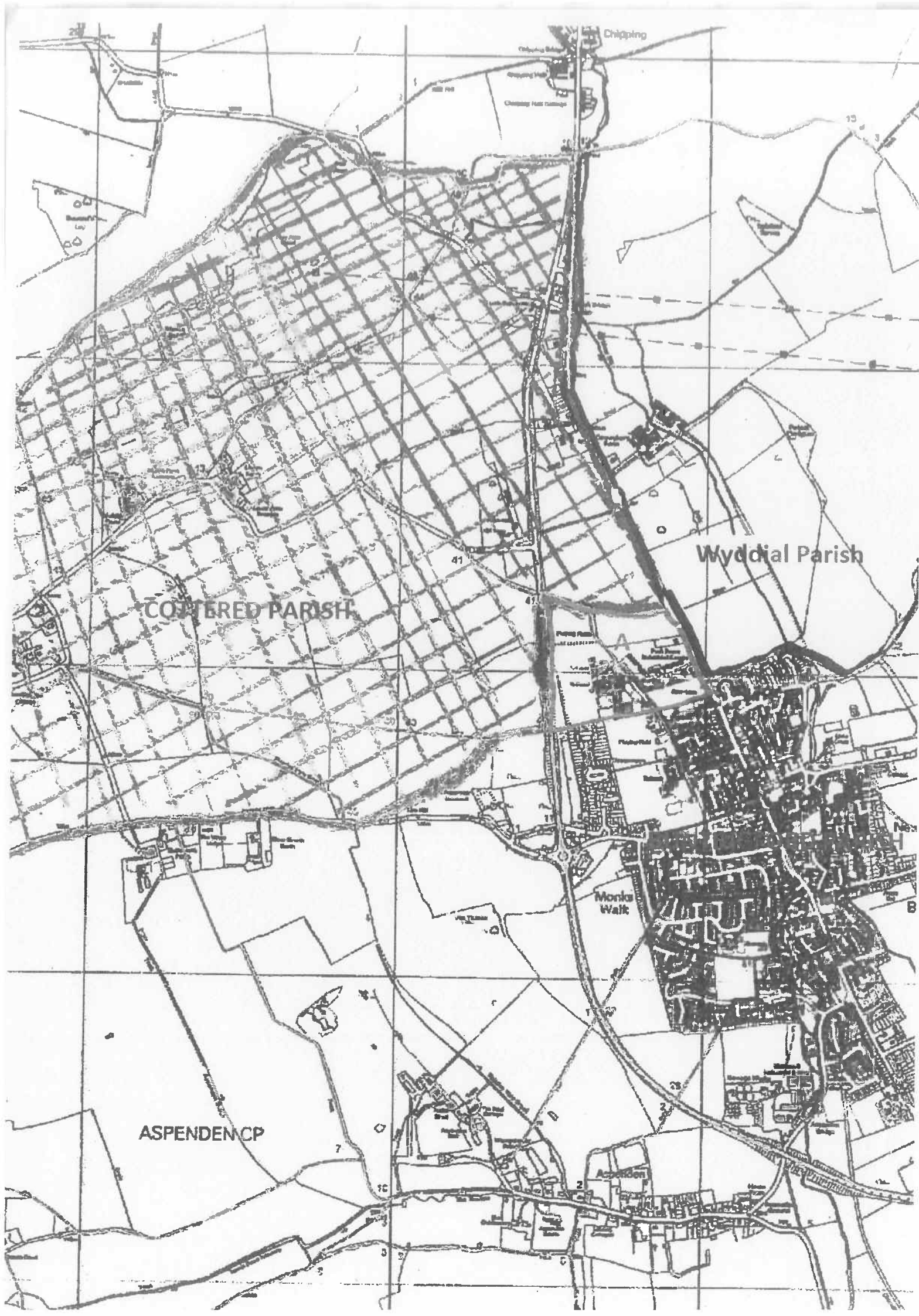
Cottered is in need of funding for a number of important projects. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the community. Should the monies be paid to Cottered Parish Council they could be used towards support for the community including some of the following:

- Provision of road safety signs and speed restriction notices. These are desperately needed to deal with traffic on the busy A507 running through the village.
- The enhancement of the entrance to the village with horticultural displays and new signage that has proven to have a calming effect on drivers.
- Funding for the provision of allotments.
- Regeneration of the local sports pavilion to accommodate local activity groups.
- Assistance with funding for the expansion of the supremely successful village hall. The hall now needs an extension to incorporate the needs of the many regular user groups including the Oasis Young adults training group, the Luncheon Club, Film Club, Football Club and Bowls Club. Funding could provide for a new kitchen, a permanent theatre stage and much needed storage.
- Support for Cottered Village Appreciation Society in keeping the village in good order and implementing the suggestions of the recent conservation review. CVAS assist in cleaning signs, cutting back overgrown areas of footpaths and numerous other voluntary tasks.

We respectfully suggest that if there is to be any boundary change whatsoever, that consideration is given to the better geographical option of including the area bounded by the historical pathway from Throcking to Ermine Street shown on your map as Broad Baulk and that includes the Freman College and Park Farm industrial area.

The enclosed map gives a far better image of the Cottered Parish than that shown in the leaflet. It does not distort the picture but better indicates that the boundaries of Cottered, Wyddial and Buntingford would be better aligned than is currently the case or would be if the boundary at the Redrow site were to be moved.

We trust that great consideration will be given to the valid objections submitted to you and we hope for a successful outcome for Cottered.



Cottered Public Rights of Way



KEY

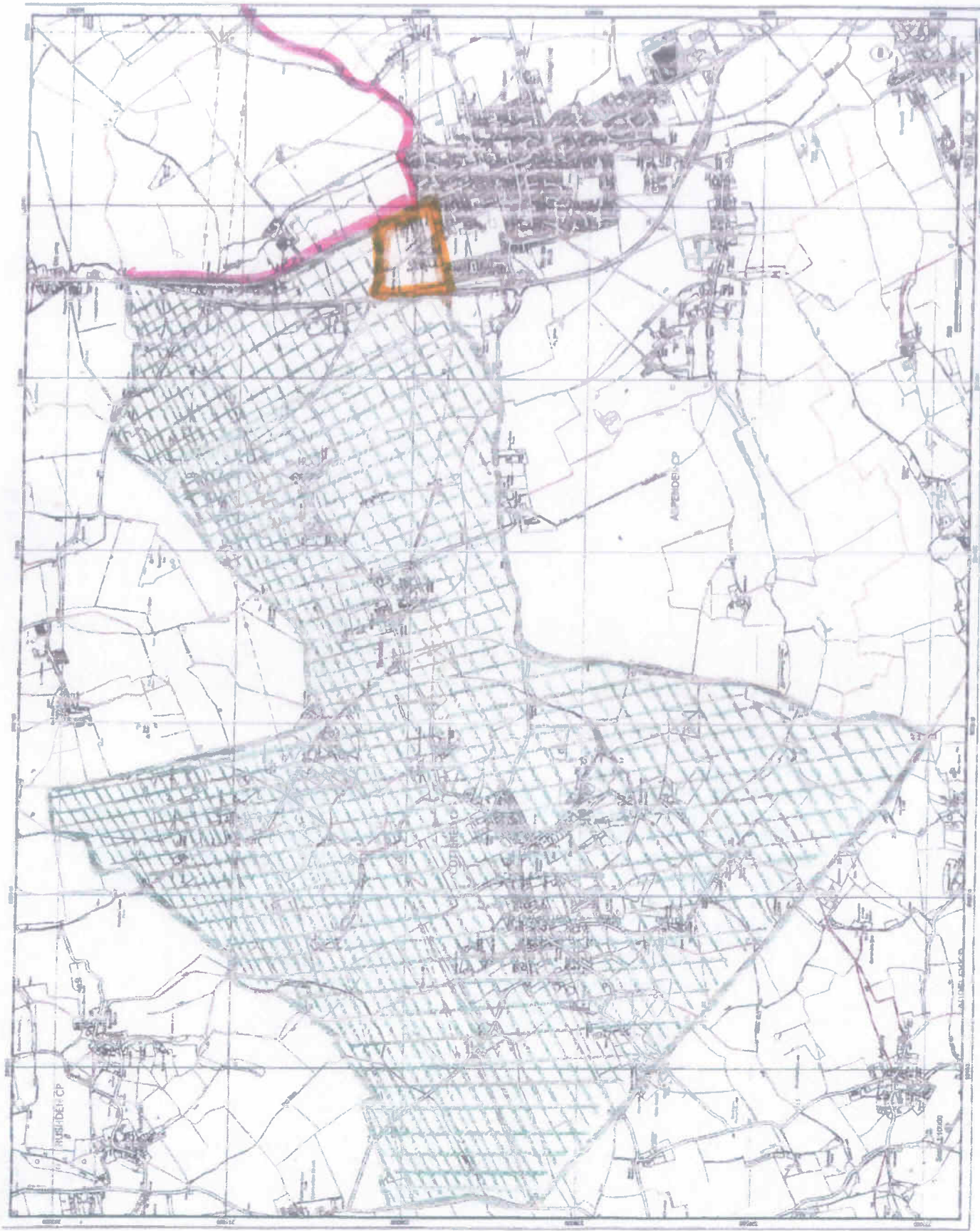
- BOAT
- BRIDLEWAY
- FOOTPATH
- FLUPP
- LC/FOOTPATH
- TEMP/FOOTPATH

Text Path Numbers

- Purish Boundary

Scale 1:10000

This map is a reproduction of the original map and is not a substitute for the original map. It is intended for reference only and should not be used for legal purposes.



Electoral Services
East Herts District Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford SG13 8EQ



Dear Sir

Comment on the Community Governance Review 2018 initiated by the Buntingford Town Council ('the Review')

I write to urge the Council to reject the changes proposed by the Review for these reasons:

- a) the Review is unnecessary, premature, and does not enjoy significant public support;
- b) the Buntingford Town Council had no mandate from future owners of the most affected homes in the area 'A', which had not yet built when this review was requested (and many are still not yet built);
- c) the position of the existing boundary is sensible and there are no good reasons to change it;
- d) the Review subverts the central government policy of encouraging communities to approve building new homes in their area;
- e) were the boundary to be moved as proposed, the residents of the area 'A' will be worse off;
- f) if the proposed change were carried in to effect, Cottered parish would be deprived of much needed funds it cannot replace from another source; and
- g) the proposed change will create an imbalance between towns and villages in the county.

1. The Review is unnecessary, premature and does not enjoy significant public support

1.1 The Local Government Boundary Commission published its *Guidance on community governance reviews* in 2010. It identified (at paragraphs 15 and 16 of that document) the following circumstances where such a review may be appropriate:

1.1.1 "over time communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their

neighbours. In such circumstances, the council should consider undertaking a community governance review..."

1.1.2 *"(a community governance review is) an opportunity to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries, tied to firm ground features, and remove the many anomalous parish boundaries that exist in England. Reviews also offer the chance to principal councils to consider the future of what may have become redundant or moribund parishes, often the result of an insufficient number of local electors within the area who are willing to serve on a parish council."*

1.1.3 *"community governance reviews may also be triggered by local people presenting public petitions to the principal council..."*

- 1.2 The new homes that are being built or are to be built in the Cottered parish in area 'A' do not straddle the existing boundary. They are, in fact, geographically separated from the residential town of Buntingford by the large campus of Freeman College and its adjacent sports fields, a substantial area of allotments, and a business park. The new homes will be surrounded by fields on all sides and are situated within a predominantly rural area similar, in fact, to many parts of Cottered parish but dissimilar to most of Buntingford.
- 1.3 These homes are not obviously part of the town of Buntingford. At best, they are satellite areas near that town connected to it by a single narrow road (Ermine Street), the limitations of which route are such that residents are certain to have the greater share of their access and egress from their homes via the junction with to the A10 to the north than to travel south through Buntingford centre. Indeed, the development has been planned that way so that the new access point to the A10 is directly opposite Throcking Lane to avoid traffic through Buntingford. In other words, on a day-to-day basis the residents of area A will travel almost exclusively through Cottered parish except when shopping in Buntingford. And parishioners of all the surrounding parishes shop regularly in Buntingford in any event simply because it is the largest nearby town.
- 1.4 There is no question of Cottered being a moribund or redundant parish. The Cottered Parish Council meets regularly, its meetings are attended by residents, and minutes of its meetings are published on its website.
- 1.5 The public has not called for a review and the public does not want it. The request for review of the boundary of Cottered parish has not come as a result of pressure by the residents of the affected areas. There has been no petition. There has been no protest. There is no groundswell of opinion demanding change.

2. Buntingford Town Council have no mandate from those persons most directly affected.

2.1 The residents of many of the homes in question (the greater part of which are not yet occupied) are new to the area, are unlikely to know the position of the parish boundary and will not yet have formed an allegiance one way or the other. It is really several years too soon to canvas their view on the subject. The Buntingford Town Council do not speak for these residents and future residents of homes not even built when this review was requested. The Buntingford Town Council has no mandate from those most affected persons to request this review. I challenge that body to identify the affected individuals from areas 'A' and 'B' who urged them to commence this review that was requested to the Council on 23 March 2016.

3. The position of the existing boundary is sensible and there are no good reasons to move it

3.1 The existing eastern boundary of Cottered and parish is sensibly placed. It ends at the old Roman road with Wyddial parish further to the west. The proposed review would move the Cottered boundary to the east side of the A10. I can discern no good reasons for such a move but if it is argued that –

3.1.1 the modern A10 ought to be the modern western boundary of Cottered parish rather than a Roman road - then the area A should logically be part of Wyddial parish *not* Buntingford; or

3.1.2 residents of the new homes in the area marked 'A' on the map will use the shopping and other facilities in Buntingford - then the whole of Cottered, Aspenden and Wyddial parishes should be incorporated into Buntingford because it is the nearest town and all the nearby villages support the town by shopping there, sending their children to school there and consult medical and dental practitioners there.

3.2 On the other hand there is no consistency or logic at all to the proposed boundary changes. Please see the attached map of the full boundaries of Cottered parish (marked in green). This map provides a much more accurate and full picture. The map attached to the materials prepared for this review projects an inappropriately Buntingford-centric perspective. I suggest the two be viewed side by side. The land marked 'B' on the latter map is commercial land to the east of the A10, the land marked 'A' residential land to the west of the same road. The only thing the two areas have in common, and surely the sole reason they are both of interest to Buntingford Town Council, is the value of the revenue to be derived from them.

3.3 In fact, the real anomaly here is that the northern boundary of Buntingford goes past the notional line that, if drawn, would connect the northern boundary of Aspenden parish and the southern boundary of

Wyddial parish. If that line were drawn, the area containing Freeman College and the Park Farm Industrial estate would fall in to Cottered parish. By simple logic that area ought properly to be part of Cottered and not Buntingford.

4. The review subverts the central government policy of encouraging communities to approve building new homes in their area

- 4.1 The boundary in question was drawn many years ago and has not been questioned until now. The reason the subject has now been raised is the new homes being built within the Cottered parish. And, more specifically, the new homes bonus and the Council Tax precept that comes from those new homes.
- 4.2 Developers of the homes being built consulted with the Cottered Parish council before development commenced and a presentation was given in the Cottered Village Hall to local residents.
- 4.3 The expressed purpose of the new homes bonus was to act as an incentive to local communities to accept and approve new housing rather than to resist change and to compensate the community for any perceived disadvantage. Cottered residents approved the new housing in expectation that their parish would receive the promised compensation. Instead:
 - 4.3.1 Buntingford Town Council now belatedly, by means of the proposed review, seeks to seize all the benefit from Cottered's endorsement of the construction of the new homes. Cottered Parish Council was asked and agreed and gave their endorsement.
 - 4.3.2 The District Council has seen fit to freeze all new homes bonus pending the outcome of this review so that, apparently, even the bonus for homes that were in Cottered parish when they were first occupied by homeowners might pass to another parish. This offends against the long established legal presumption against retrospective effect of changes. The lawfulness of both the freeze and any ultimately changed distribution as a result of a subsequent community governance review is dubious but whether or not it is strictly lawful, it is very plainly not right.
 - 4.3.3 Because most of the traffic from areas 'A' and 'B' will go through Cottered parish, Cottered will have all of the inconvenience of the additional homes and Buntingford the benefit of additional trade for its shops.
- 4.4 If the review is carried in to effect as proposed, it will undermine the purpose and intent of central government expressed in the new homes bonus scheme.

5. Residents of the new homes will be better served by the Cottered parish

- 5.1 The published *Guidance on community governance reviews* recognises the importance of parishes within sustainable communities (at paragraphs 50 – 61 and elsewhere in the document). It speaks of neighbourhoods, cohesion, as well as the benefit of people feeling that they have a stake in society and the ability to influence decisions affecting their lives. At paragraph 23 it says that *"the recommendations made in a community governance review ought to bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services"*.
- 5.2 In all those respects, the residents of the area within Cottered parish that Buntingford District Council now seeks to appropriate from its neighbour, are better served within the Cottered parish - the parish is much smaller and voices are more readily able to be heard by the Parish Council. The ratio of parishioners to Parish Councillor is 80:1 in Cottered parish compared to 400:1 in Buntingford. Most people are likely to prefer to have a substantial voice in a smaller community than for their voice to not to be heard amongst many others in a larger community.
- 5.3 Despite these disadvantages, if the boundary were moved as proposed then residents of the affected areas will pay significantly more Council Tax – a difference of around £100 a year in Band D - than they would have paid had the boundary remained where it is now.

6. If the boundary review is carried in to effect, Cottered will be deprived of much needed funds

- 6.1 Substantial numbers of new homes have not been built in the Cottered parish for some years, so to snatch away a new homes bonus that the parish had justly expected to receive and also to reduce the number of homes in the parish (and with it their valuable Council Tax precept) would be a bitter blow to the parish that would diminish its ability to provide the services and facilities that nourish its community. Substantial capital projects intended to improve the lives of residents, such as upgrading of road signs and street furniture to improve safety, may have to be abandoned.
- 6.2 Because the homes in area 'A' will have vehicular access to their properties primarily via the new A10 entrance opposite Throcking Lane, it is inevitable that Cottered parish will see increased road traffic as a result. It is exactly this sort of dis-benefit that the new homes bonus was intended to compensate for. Without those funds, Cottered will be unable to take steps to ameliorate the effects as it may otherwise have been able to do.
- 6.3 Buntingford has had a number of substantial new home developments within its existing boundary in recent years, with more to come. On the

other hand, no other sources of revenue of a similar magnitude are expected to come to Cottered parish in the near future. This is then a one-time only boon for the parish, now at risk of being to be lost due to the last minute, unexpected move by Buntingford District Council to take the funds as their own.

- 6.4 Residents of Cottered and Aspenden parishes will surely not forget any time soon the slight upon them if the Council decides this matter in favour of Buntingford District Council.

7. If the review were carried in to effect, an imbalance would be created between towns and villages in the county

- 7.1 Neighbourhoods cohere around shared facilities and shared interests. Such facilities and interests are nurtured by funds. A smaller parish will have fewer residents and so receive less Council Tax precept. But it costs the same to maintain a public facility such as a village hall, a sports field, or a village green in a small parish as it does in a larger one. And so if smaller communities are to be sustainable and civic participation increase as government wishes to be the case, smaller parishes such as Cottered must receive funds when they are available.
- 7.2 Without access to the very funds that are intended to support and nourish their communities, smaller parishes will wither on the vine as they will struggle to maintain their community facilities and fail to deliver new projects that require capital expenditure. As towns get bigger, villages are at risk of becoming mere dormitories whose residents must travel by motor car to towns to access any facilities. This is destructive of small communities. And yet the Commission on Integration and Cohesion in its report *Our Shared Future* has stressed the benefits of community and as the County Council's draft Local Transport Plan seeks to reduce motor car journeys.
- 7.3 The area marked 'A' on the map is not very far from Buntingford. As best I can discern, that is the main thrust of Buntingford Town Council's argument for this review. If that is the case, it is a poor argument. By definition, the land immediately on one side of a border is proximate to the land on the other. That is the nature of a border. It also follows that the land alongside the border is farthest from the centre of the area that is defined by that border. It cannot be right that parishes throughout the county whose land borders on a town must accept that as their parish develops, the town will gradually incorporate that developed land. If that were so, parishes will shrink and villages will be impoverished as they are stripped of their most valuable land and its accompanying precept and left with only the land that neighbouring towns do not value. Towns on the other hand will grow steadily and prosper. If the Council values towns above villages, it will surely support the proposed review as Buntingford Town Council urges. Cottered parishioners are nevertheless confident that the Council will

take a different and more balanced view toward the appropriate balance between villages and towns in our county.

8. Aspenden parish

- 8.1 I am not resident in Aspenden parish and I have no standing to speak for its residents. It seems to me, however, that many of the points raised above apply equally to the portion of land that Buntingford Town Council seeks to take from Aspenden as they do to the land that it wants to take from Cottered.
- 8.2 I am not able to discern any compelling reason why the existing position in relation to the land marked 'B' ought to be changed in regards to that land or why it ought to be part of Buntingford other than that Buntingford Town Council will benefit financially from that change. I suggest, however, that such benefit is outweighed by the corresponding detriment to the small parish of Aspenden.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 I urge the Council to reject the request of Buntingford Town Council that the existing boundaries of Cottered parish and Aspenden parish be reviewed.

Yours faithfully

