

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ANNUAL COUNCIL – 16 MAY 2018

REPORT BY HEAD OF LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND
MONITORING OFFICER

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF BISHOP'S STORTFORD TOWN
COUNCIL – REPORT ON INITIAL CONSULTATION AND DRAFT
RECOMMENDATIONS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: BISHOP'S STORTFORD ALL SAINTS,
CENTRAL, MEADS, SILVERLEYS AND
SOUTH; MUCH HADHAM

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To report the responses received during the initial consultation period for the Community Governance Review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, together with the recommendations of the Executive; and to propose draft recommendations of the review to the Council for adoption.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL: That:

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| (A) | the Council consider the responses received to the initial consultation on the Community Governance Review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, together with the recommendations of the Executive in relation to the review; and |
| (B) | the Council agree the draft recommendations of the Community Governance Review as the basis for a further round of public consultation as follows:- |

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| | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That the detailed ward boundary changes within the existing area of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, as proposed by the Town Council and shown in the maps included in Essential Reference Paper B be agreed;2. That the whole of the St Michael's Mead development and the proposed area of further housing development south of Whittington Way be incorporated within Bishop's Stortford;3. That Thorley Street and the areas east of London Road and the railway, including Pig Lane and Twyford Bury Lane remain part of Thorley parish;4. That the revised parish boundary between Bishop's Stortford and Thorley be as shown in the plan at paragraph 7.35 of the report;5. That the Local Government Boundary Commission for England be recommended to amend the district ward boundaries accordingly;6. That the revised area of Thorley Parish Council be unwarded; and7. That the revised Thorley Parish Council comprise of five parish councillors. |
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1.0 Background – Community Governance Reviews

- 1.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act') provides that a principal authority such as East Herts Council may review and make changes to the governance arrangements for parishes and parish/town councils in its area.

- 1.2 The procedure for making decisions on these matters is a Community Governance Review. This is a review of the whole or part of the district with a view to making recommendations on one or more of the following:-
- Creating, merging or abolishing parishes;
 - Boundary alterations between existing parishes;
 - The naming of parishes and the style of new parishes;
 - The establishment of parish councils;
 - Electoral arrangements for parish councils (the year of election; number of councillors; warding), and/or
 - Grouping parishes under a common parish council or de-grouping parishes.
- 1.3 A Community Governance Review may be triggered by a statutory petition or a formal 'application' in the terms of the 2007 Act, or the Council may decide to undertake a review at any time, e.g. in response to population changes or new housing development, as part of a periodic programme of reviews or in response to a request from a town/parish council.
- 1.4 In undertaking a review the Council must consult local electors and other interested parties and must follow guidance issued by the Secretary of State and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE).
- 1.5 A Community Governance Review begins when the Council publishes terms of reference for the review and ends when it agrees the final recommendations (which must be within 12 months of the review starting) and adopts a Community Governance Reorganisation Order detailing any changes in accordance with those recommendations. Any revised electoral arrangements take effect at the next ordinary parish elections, which in East Herts are scheduled for May 2019.
- 1.6 In accordance with regulations issued under the Local

Government Act 2000, functions relating to Community Governance Reviews are not to be the responsibility of an authority's executive. The draft and final recommendations of the review must therefore be agreed by the Council or under delegated arrangements agreed by the Council.

2.0 Community Governance Review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council

2.1 The Council on 16 December 2015 agreed to undertake a Community Governance Review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, including the town boundary. The review was agreed following a request from Bishop's Stortford Town Council, which identified two issues for consideration:-

- (i) **The ward boundaries within the town.** The Town Council made a number of detailed proposals for changes to ward boundaries within the town to address perceived anomalies arising from new or infill developments, such as roads split between two or more wards or where access is from a different ward.

Full details of the Town Council's request, including maps of the proposed ward boundary changes, are attached in **Essential Reference Paper B**.

- (ii) **The parish boundary between Bishop's Stortford and Thorley.** The Town Council identified development which crosses the parish boundary - for example at St Michael's Mead - and areas of future development to the south of the town either consented or envisaged in the district plan. Parts of the areas identified are currently in Thorley Parish but the Town Council considers the developments are, or will be, seen by residents as part of Bishop's Stortford and has proposed that its boundary with Thorley Parish be re-drawn to follow the existing district

ward boundary, including the whole of the District Council's Bishop's Stortford South Ward within the area of Bishop's Stortford Town Council.

A map showing the area which the Town Council considers should be transferred into its remit is included in the consultation leaflet at **Essential Reference Paper C**.

3.0 Timetable for the review and progress to date

- 3.1 The review began on 13 February 2018 with the publication of terms of reference setting out the aims, process and timetable, the matters on which it would focus and policies that the District Council considers relevant. This commenced the first period of public consultation until 6 April 2018, during which local residents and all interested parties were invited to make initial submissions on the Town Council's proposals and any other matters that they feel should be considered.
- 3.2 Following the close of the initial consultation, the submissions received were reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Executive. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 17 April 2018 forwarded its comments on the community governance review to the Executive on 24 April, which agreed recommendations to the Council as set out in section 7 of this report. The Council is now invited to agree its draft recommendations for the community governance review.
- 3.3 The Council's draft recommendations will then be published for a further round of public consultation until 20 July 2018. It is proposed that any Community Governance Reorganisation Order will be made at the Council Meeting on 17 October 2018, in order to allow for the implementation of any agreed changes in the revised register of electors on 1 December 2018 and (if

applicable) in the council tax base data ahead of the new financial year.

4.0 Criteria for making recommendations

- 4.1 Section 93 of the 2007 Act requires principal councils to ensure that community governance within the area under review will be:-
- reflective of the identities and interests of the community in that area; and
 - effective and convenient
- 4.2 The LGBCE guidance states that when considering these criteria, councils should take into account factors including the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion; and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish. The guidance further states that 'the general rule should be that the parish is based on an area which reflects community identity and interest and which is of a size which is viable as an administrative unit of local government'

Community identities and interests

- 4.3 In accordance with the above principles, the Council has set out policies in the terms of reference for the review including the following:-
- *The Council considers that parishes should reflect distinctive and recognisable communities of interest, with their own sense of identity and that electors should be able to identify clearly with the parish in which they are resident. The feeling of local community and the wishes of local inhabitants are therefore important considerations in the review.*

- *The Council will give careful consideration both to traditional community identities and historic parish arrangements; and to any changes that have happened over time, for example population movements or new development, that may have led to a different community identity in an area.*
- *The Council considers that the boundaries between parishes will normally reflect the distinct community identities of the respective areas. Boundaries will often follow areas of low population between settlements or pronounced physical barriers (either natural or built) such as watercourses, marshland or moorland; parks, canals, railways or major roads.*
- *Should a reorganisation of parish boundaries occur as a result of the review, the Council will aim to select boundaries that are and are likely to remain easily identifiable.*

Effective and convenient community governance

4.4 The LGBCE guidance states:- 'With local parish and town councils in mind, effective and convenient local government essentially means that such councils should be viable in terms of providing at least some local services, and if they are to be convenient they need to be easy to reach and accessible to local people'.

4.5 In relation to viability, the Council has set out the following policy in the terms of reference for the review:-

- *The Council wishes to ensure that parishes should be viable as an administrative unit and should possess a precept that enables them effectively to promote the well-being of their residents and contribute to the provision of services in their areas.*

Electoral arrangements

4.6 Once the Council has determined whether it will recommend any changes to parish boundaries, it must go on to consider if any changes are required to the electoral arrangements for the parish(es).

- **Warding:** The Council must consider whether a parish should be, or should continue to be, divided into wards for the purposes of elections to the parish council and the number and boundaries of parish wards, taking account of population distribution and community identity and interests in the area.
- **The number of councillors:** The Council must consider the number of councillors to be elected for each parish/ward and the number of electors they represent. In so doing the Council will, as required by the 2007 Act, have regard to the current number of electors; and any change in that number which is likely to occur in the next five years.

4.7 The Council should also have regard to existing levels of representation, the pattern of existing council sizes which have stood the test of time and the take-up of seats at elections. There is no duty to ensure electoral equality between parishes or wards, but the LGBCE believes it is not in the interests of effective and convenient local government, either for voters or councillors, to have significant differences in representation.

4.8 Where a reorganisation order includes significant changes to parish boundaries, the order may cover consequential matters that appear to the Council to be necessary or proper to give effect to the order. These may include the transfer and management or custody of property, the setting of precepts for new parishes, provision with respect to the transfer of any functions, property, rights and liabilities and/or provision for

the transfer of staff, compensation for loss of office, pensions and other staffing matters. In these matters, the Council will be guided by relevant regulations issued under the 2007 Act.

5.0 Consultation process

5.1 For the initial consultation period to 6 April 2018, a range of channels were used to publicise the review and invite electors and others to respond including:-

- Notification to the relevant parish/town councils and to the County Council
- Notification to elected representatives for the areas under review and local political parties
- Letters/e-mails to 46 community groups and business organisations based in the areas under review
- Consultation leaflets (copy attached at Essential Reference Paper C) distributed via the Council offices at Wallfields and Charringtons, Bishop's Stortford Library, community centres/halls and other local venues
- Consultation leaflets also delivered to all properties directly affected by the Town Council's specific proposals
- A dedicated page for the review on the 'consultations' section of the EHDC website consultation with an online form for responses and periodic links from the home page
- Press releases, social media and 'network' posts and an article in Link magazine sent out with the Council Tax bills.

5.2 Responses were accepted by post, e-mail or via the online form.

6.0 Responses to the consultation

6.1 In total 125 responses to the consultation were received directly from individuals and organisations – 102 via the online

form and 23 others. These direct responses can be broken down as follows:-

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|---------------------------------|-----|--|--|
| Local residents | 108 | from BS South Ward Thorley Urban Ward BS Central Ward BS Silverleys Ward BS All Saints Ward Thorley Rural Ward Not stated | 64 (59.3%) 23 (21.3%) 6 (5.5%) 5 (4.6%) 4 (3.7%) 3 (2.7%) 3 (2.7%) |
| Local employee/business person | 1 | from BS South Ward | 1 |
| Members of Thorley Cricket Club | 6 | | |
| Organisations | 9 | Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation Hertford & Stortford Conservative Association Thorley Parish Council x 2 Hertfordshire County Council Bishop's Stortford Town Council Hockerill Residents' Association Town Mayor, Bishop's Stortford Town Council The Hundred Parishes Society Old Thorley & Twyford Residents' Association | |

6.2 In addition, 394 individually signed pro-forma letters were received objecting to the proposed Thorley boundary change and a petition was received, signed by a total of 960 persons, calling for 'no change to the current boundary between Thorley village and Bishop's Stortford'.

6.3 All of the responses received to the consultation are set out in

full in **Essential Reference Paper D**. A summary of the responses and issues raised on each of the issues under review is included in the relevant part of section 7 below.

7.0 Issues for consideration

(a) THE WARD BOUNDARIES WITHIN BISHOP'S STORTFORD TOWN COUNCIL

- 7.1 The detailed changes proposed by the Town Council to ward boundaries within the existing Bishop's Stortford parish area are set out in the Town Council's submission at Essential Reference Paper B. These represent changes to roads which have residents in more than one ward and where the Town Council has requested that the boundary be redrawn either (i) so that all properties are in the ward which currently has the largest number of electors; or (ii) so that the road(s) are in the ward from which access is gained or for some other reason as noted. A total of approximately 450 properties, currently housing approximately 850 electors, are included in the proposals across 18 separate locations.
- 7.2 Officers have reviewed the proposals and visited the locations identified. In each case the proposals appear successfully to address anomalies that have arisen in the main due to new or infill development and have the potential to provide practical and convenient arrangements for electors.
- 7.3 The net effect of the proposed changes on electoral equality between the wards would be relatively minor. Currently the average number of electors per town councillor across all five Bishop's Stortford wards is 1,599. Central ward currently has the highest ratio at 1,870 and Silverleys the lowest at 1,399. The changes would slightly reduce the ratio for Central ward and slightly increase that for Silverleys, thereby improving equality by a small margin overall. South ward would gain the

largest number of electors (approximately 340) but its ratio would still remain within 3.0% of the town average.

- 7.4 In deciding whether to recommend implementation of the proposed ward boundary changes, the Council will note that any such changes would not automatically change the equivalent district ward (or county division) boundaries. This would be a matter for the LGBCE and there could be a short-term loss of coterminosity between the parish ward and principal area division boundaries (for further details see paragraphs 7.44 to 7.46 below).

Consultation responses

- 7.5 Only twelve respondents made any substantive comments about the detailed ward boundary proposals. Of these, one opposed the changes and four stated 'no comment' or similar. The other seven respondents were broadly supportive of the changes, seeing them as generally sensible proposals to address anomalies arising from new developments that had been built across the existing ward boundaries.
- 7.6 One respondent stated that 'BS Central needs complete redrawing as it doesn't include much of the town centre. There might need to be wide ranging changes once BS North is developed, as this could be a good opportunity to start afresh'. Another respondent felt that consideration should be given to reducing the number of town councillors, pointing out that the BSTC wards were relatively well represented compared to district council or county council representation.

Recommendations of the Executive

- 7.7 The Executive supported the proposed changes and
RESOLVED:-

That the Council be recommended to include the proposed ward boundary changes in the draft recommendations of the review; and also to recommend the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to amend the district ward boundaries accordingly.

(b) THE PARISH BOUNDARY BETWEEN BISHOP'S STORTFORD AND THORLEY

- 7.8 The criteria of 'community interests and identities' and 'effective and convenient community governance' are both relevant to any decision on the Town Council's proposal to change this boundary.
- 7.9 It is certainly the case that the new boundary proposed (St James Way) is a '*pronounced physical barrier (either natural or built) such as a major road*' and is '*likely to remain easily identifiable*'. Indeed it is already the district ward boundary. In addition, St Michael's Mead adjoins the built-up area of Bishop's Stortford and crosses the existing parish boundary. As a result, the boundary in that area no longer meets the criteria in the LGBCE guidance, which is that parish boundaries 'should reflect the "no-man's land" between communities represented by areas of low population or barriers such as rivers, roads or railways.' In relation to the significant proposed development that is indicated in the District Plan at Bishop's Stortford South (south of Whittington Way), by 2023 it is projected that there will be 300 dwellings on that site, which development will also cross the existing parish boundary. The Town Council suggests that residents of these urban extensions are likely to feel part of the Bishop's Stortford community.
- 7.10 The issue is perhaps less clear cut in other parts of the area proposed for review. No compelling evidence has been provided to support the transfer of Thorley Street and the areas east of London Road and the railway including Pig Lane

and Twyford Bury Lane to Bishop's Stortford Town Council. The Council will note that it has discretion to make changes to the boundary that differ from those suggested by the Town Council if it feels this is appropriate.

- 7.11 The Bishop's Stortford Neighbourhood Plan for All Saints, Central, South and part of Thorley includes in its area the whole of Thorley Urban ward.
- 7.12 The question of 'effective and convenient community governance' and in particular the future viability of Thorley Parish Council is also a key consideration. If the whole of the area proposed by the Town Council were to be transferred to Bishop's Stortford, the remaining area of Thorley Parish (the current Thorley Rural ward) would have a current electorate of just 47.
- 7.13 Section 94 of the 2007 Act provides that where a council creates a new parish, if that parish has 150 or fewer electors the principal council may not recommend that a parish council be created. This threshold does not apply to existing parish councils – if a Community Governance Review concludes that the existence of the parish council reflects community identities and provides effective and convenient local government, despite the small number of electors, then it can recommend that the parish council should stay in existence – but the question of viability must be considered.
- 7.14 This may have a bearing on the Council's recommendations in one of two ways. Firstly the Council could decide that the potential future non-viability of Thorley Parish Council is a significant enough factor that the Town Council's proposal should not be agreed on the grounds that it would not promote effective and convenient community governance.

7.15 Alternatively, if the Council is of the view that the boundary should nevertheless be changed for reasons of community identities and interests, it would be necessary to consider further recommendations in relation to Thorley Parish including other arrangements for community representation. These could include one of the following:-

- a) Retention of Thorley parish and its parish council within its reduced area;
- b) Retention of Thorley parish with a reduced area but grouped with another parish for parish council purposes;
- c) Retention of Thorley parish with a reduced area but with the parish council replaced by a parish meeting; or
- d) Abolition of Thorley parish or the inclusion of its reduced area into Bishop's Stortford or another neighbouring parish.

7.16 Any proposal for a change of the types (b) to (d) would require a further public consultation, including the residents and other interested parties in any other parish area involved.

Consultation responses

7.17 In total, eight respondents agreed with the Town Council's proposal either in full or in part. Two respondents sought further information and 114 respondents opposed the change.

7.18 Respondents completing the online form were asked to state whether in their opinion, residents of the existing Thorley Urban Ward identified more closely with Bishop's Stortford or with Thorley. 92 respondents answered Thorley, 3 answered Bishop's Stortford and 7 stated 'don't know'.

7.19 The eight respondents who submitted responses in support of the Town Council's proposal included Bishop's Stortford Town Council itself, Hertford & Stortford Conservative Association, Hockerill Residents' Association, and the Town Mayor, Bishop's

Stortford Town Council. The Town Council made the following arguments in support of its proposal:-

- a) St Michaels Mead is contiguous with the built up area of Bishop's Stortford but is split between the parishes of Bishop's Stortford and Thorley, an unnatural administrative division of a single housing area.
- b) This will also apply to the proposed area known as 'Land South of Bishop's Stortford', allocated principally for housing in the emerging District plan.
- c) The residents of the above developments do or will expect to take advantage of the services provided by Bishop's Stortford Town Council.
- d) The proposed boundary and in particular the bypass forms a more natural boundary between a rural area and the contiguous built up area of Bishop's Stortford.
- e) The current boundary fails to meet the criteria for parish boundaries set out in the Government guidance; and
- f) The parish boundaries other than as specified above represent natural and defensible boundaries meeting the criteria set out in the guidance.

7.20 Other respondents in favour of the change stated that residents would use the facilities and services provided by Bishop's Stortford Town Council and would be better represented on the town council, and that the by-pass represents a more realistic boundary which would resolve an anomaly between the town council and district ward boundaries.

7.21 The 114 direct respondents who opposed the change included Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation, Thorley Parish Council, The Hundred Parishes Society, Old Thorley & Twyford Residents' Association and 22 residents of the area directly affected (Thorley Urban Ward).

- 7.22 Respondents opposing the change referred to Thorley having a distinctive rural character, community identity and history separate from Bishop's Stortford. Some consider that the Town Council is not representative of local views or that the proposals are driven by financial or political factors.
- 7.23 A number of respondents stated that Thorley Parish Council currently performs well on behalf of residents and others pointed out that if the Town Council's proposals are agreed, Thorley Parish would be left with very few electors and the viability of the parish council would be threatened.
- 7.24 Some respondents stated that the Town Council had not provided sufficient evidence to support their proposal in the context of the criteria for the review. Others considered that the review is premature as the 'BISH5' development is not yet fully approved and if confirmed will not be fully built and occupied for many years.
- 7.25 A majority of direct respondents opposing the change have cited reasons related to perceived actual or potential over-development, inadequate infrastructure, opposition to proposed development on the Whittington Way site and/or preservation of the Green Belt or other issues which are matters for the planning process and not directly relevant to the criteria for the community governance review. Fewer than 35 of the responses make reference to matters specifically relevant to the criteria for the review. Some respondents feel the Town Council's proposals are intended to enable more development on green belt land or to remove Thorley Parish Council and stakeholders from the masterplanning process in the District Plan. Others consider that Thorley Parish Council will better represent the views of residents on planning applications than Bishop's Stortford Town Council.
- 7.26 There are a number of references to Thorley Village being for

planning purposes a Group 3 village within the emerging East Herts District Plan which as such would not be expected to accommodate the same level of development as Group 1 and Group 2 villages. However, this would not be affected by the proposed boundary change. The emerging East Herts District Plan includes an urban extension to Bishop's Stortford known as Bishop's Stortford South which falls partly within the wider Parish of Thorley, but not in Thorley Village itself.

- 7.27 Three respondents suggested an alternative change to the boundary. They considered that a more logical and less radical change would be for Thorley Parish Council instead to take over the fringe areas of Bishop's Stortford up to the south side of Whittington Way and Obrey Way to Thorley Street including Thorley Lane East/Church Lane and the Thorley cricket field. Another respondent suggested that all of St Michael's Mead should be in Bishop's Stortford, along with other areas inside the bypass if they are developed, and to maintain a viable Thorley Parish the properties on Thorley Street could remain in Thorley parish.
- 7.28 Both Thorley Parish Council and the Old Thorley and Twyford Residents' Association indicated in their responses that they intend to bring forward counter proposals.
- 7.29 Overall, of the 115 individual direct respondents to the consultation, 80 (69.6%) are residents of Bishop's Stortford and 26 (22.6%) are residents of Thorley. Of the 26 Thorley respondents, 69% (18) are from the Pig Lane, Thorley Street or Rectory Close areas. Relatively few consultation responses (5, or 4.35% of the total) were received from residents of the Thorley part of St Michael's Mead.
- 7.30 In addition as mentioned above, a petition signed by 960 persons and 394 individual proforma letters also opposed the proposed change. Signatories to the petition gave addresses

across all wards of Bishop's Stortford and beyond. Only fourteen of the signatories gave an address in Thorley. Approximately 109 of the proforma letters gave addresses within Thorley Parish, 89 of which are within the area directly affected - all from the Thorley Street, Pig Lane or Rectory Close areas. The wording of the proforma letters does not provide any specific reasons or evidence in relation to the criteria for the review other than a statement that 'the proposed changes do not demonstrate any of the terms of reference'.

Recommendations of the Executive

- 7.31 At the meeting of the Executive on 24 April 2018, Councillor G McAndrew expressed concern over the future viability of Thorley Parish Council and referred to the cohesion and identity of the local community. He also referred to the level of consultation responses and the evident tensions arising from the emerging District Plan. Various other Members also expressed similar concerns and spoke of the distinct local characteristics of Thorley Parish.
- 7.32 Councillor S Rutland-Barsby referred to the number of consultation responses that appeared to have been made on planning grounds rather than governance matters. She acknowledged the concerns for the future of Thorley Parish and suggested a compromise whereby only the St Michael's Mead development and the proposed area of further housing development south of Whittington Way be incorporated within Bishop's Stortford.
- 7.33 Other Members supported this view and referred to the anomalies of the boundary cutting through St Michael's Mead.
- 7.34 Following debate the Executive RESOLVED:-

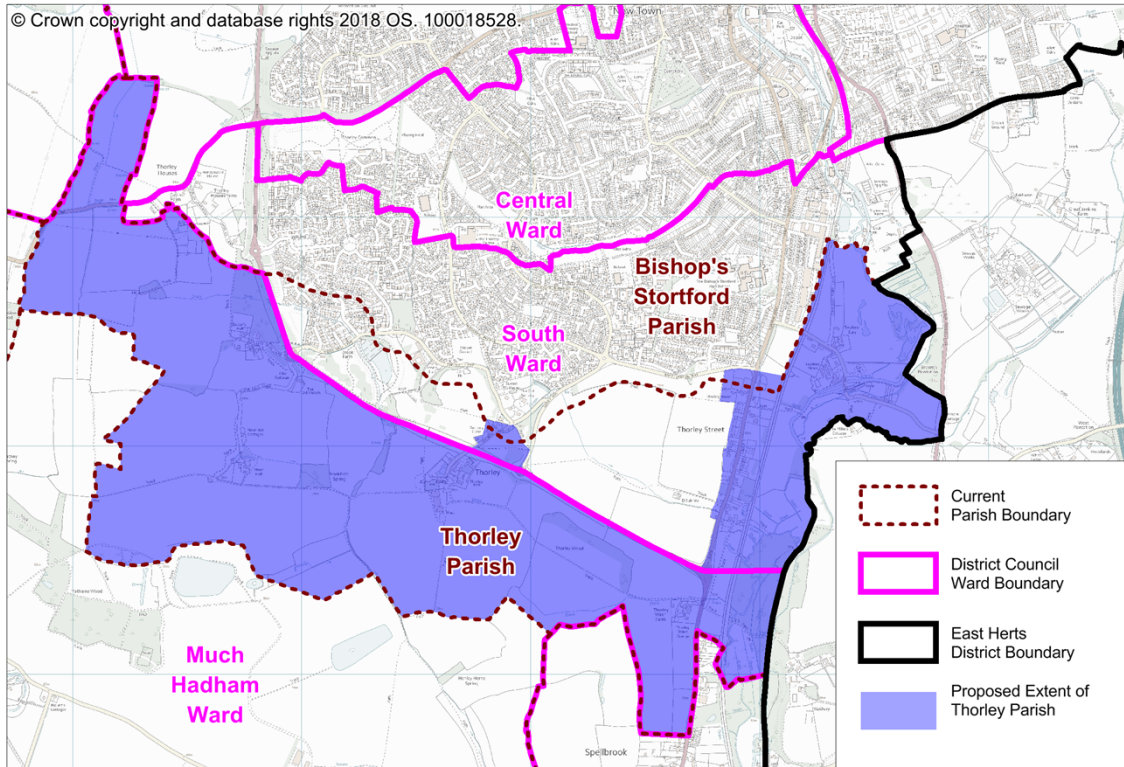
That the Council be recommended to include in the draft

recommendations of the review a change to the parish boundary between Bishop's Stortford and Thorley, such that the whole of the St Michael's Mead development and the proposed area of further housing development south of Whittington Way be incorporated within Bishop's Stortford; and

That the Council be recommended that Thorley Street and the areas east of London Road and the railway, including Pig Lane and Twyford Bury Lane should remain part of Thorley parish, reflecting their more rural nature and securing the viability of the revised Thorley parish area.

7.35 Officers have prepared the plan below showing a proposed new parish boundary between Bishop's Stortford and Thorley taking into account the Executive's recommendations above. The shaded area represents the revised area of Thorley Parish. This proposal also tidies up existing anomalies affecting a small number of properties in two areas:-

- All properties in Rectory Close, which is currently split between the two parishes, would move into Thorley Parish
- Numbers 6 to 9 Park View Cottages, situated east of London Road and south of the junction with Whittington Way, would also move into Thorley Parish



(c) Electoral arrangements – warding

7.36 Regarding whether a parish should (continue to) be divided into wards, the 2007 Act requires the Council to consider whether:

- the number, or distribution of the local government electors for the parish would make a single election of councillors impracticable or inconvenient; and
- it is desirable that any area or areas of the parish should be separately represented.

7.37 Bishop's Stortford Town Council is currently divided into five wards and no evidence has been submitted to the review that the number of wards should increase or decrease, regardless of whether the boundary changes are agreed.

7.38 In relation to Thorley Parish Council, the parish is currently divided into two wards – Urban and Rural. If the proposal of the Executive to transfer part of the area that currently makes up the Urban ward to Bishop's Stortford is agreed, there will be

a need to reconsider the electoral arrangements for the remainder of the parish. It is suggested that in this case it would be appropriate for the revised area of Thorley Parish to be unwarded.

7.39 The Council will note that at 513, Thorley currently has the lowest electorate of any warded parish within East Herts.

(d) Electoral arrangements – the number of town/parish councillors

7.40 The tables in **Essential Reference Paper E** show the current and forecast electorates and elector-to-councillor ratios for each town/parish council and ward under review, for each of three possible outcomes of the review (i.e (i) 'no change', (ii) implementation of the Town Council's proposals, and (iii) implementation of the Executive's recommendations).

7.41 The figures suggest that within Bishop's Stortford, electors of Central Ward are currently slightly under-represented on the town council and that if no boundary changes are made this under-representation will increase slightly over the next five years, whilst by 2023 electors of All Saints and South Wards may be relatively over-represented due to new development elsewhere in the town. This may require an adjustment in the allocation of seats on the council.

7.42 If either the Town Council's or the Executive's recommendations are agreed, the under-representation in Central Ward and the over-representation in South Ward are less significant but the relative over-representation in All Saints Ward will remain an issue.

7.43 For Thorley Parish Council, there is already a significant electoral inequality between the two wards and this is forecast to be exacerbated further in the 'no boundary change' scenario.

If the Town Council's proposed boundary changes are made, Thorley Parish would be left with 47 electors currently and this is not forecast to rise significantly by 2023. If the Executive's recommendations are agreed, the revised Thorley Parish area would have 218 electors currently, rising to a forecast 231 in 2023. Based on the arrangements in place in parishes of comparable size elsewhere in East Herts, it is suggested that it would be appropriate for a parish council with an electorate of this size to have the statutory minimum number of parish councillors, i.e. five.

(e) Consequential recommendations to the LGBCE

- 7.44 Any changes to parish or parish/town ward boundaries as a result of this review will not automatically change the corresponding district ward or county division boundaries. In the event that such changes are made the Council should therefore consider recommending the LGBCE that the district ward and county division boundaries are realigned to follow the revised parish/parish ward boundaries. The LGBCE would require evidence that the Council has consulted on this as part of the review.
- 7.45 Officers have sought advice from counterparts at the LGBCE regarding how likely the Commission would be to agree to such recommendations and whether this could be done in time for the all-out district and parish elections in May 2019.
- 7.46 In response the LGBCE has advised that if a formal request for 'related alterations' is received by September 2018, the required changes could be made in time for the May 2019 elections if the Commission were to agree to them. In the past the Commission has generally agreed related alterations but in circumstances where electoral variances would increase significantly the Commission may choose not to agree them, particularly where the variances grow to such an extent that

they would meet the Commission's criteria for an electoral review of the district.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The initial consultation period for the Community Governance Review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council closed on Friday 6 April. This report sets out the issues for consideration in the review, the results of that consultation and the recommendations of the Executive in relation to the review. The Council is invited to agree the draft recommendations of the review.
- 8.2 The Council's draft recommendations will be subject to a second round of public consultation between May and July 2018. Following the second round of consultation and in accordance with the statutory process, if the Council accepts the recommendations arising from a review it will make an order to implement the proposals.

9.0 Implications/Consultations

- 9.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found in **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

None

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