

EAST HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF BISHOP'S STORTFORD
TOWN COUNCIL**

**NOTES OF A PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING
HELD ON 18 JULY 2018 AT THE ST BARNABAS CENTRE, THORLEY**

PRESENT: Councillor Geoff Williamson, Executive Member, East Herts District Council (Chair)
Ms Liz Watts, Chief Executive, East Herts District Council
Mr John Williams, Electoral Services Officer, East Herts District Council

Councillor Robin Lumsden, Chairman, Thorley Parish Council

Councillor John Wyllie, Leader, Bishop's Stortford Town Council
Mr James Parker, Chief Executive, Bishop's Stortford Town Council

Mrs Sylvia McDonald, Old Thorley & Twyford Residents' Association (OTTRA)

Approximately 57 local residents/representatives of local organisations

The meeting opened at 7.00 p.m.

1. Welcome and introductions

Councillor Williamson (Chair) welcomed all present to the meeting which would consider the current community governance review as it affects Thorley and Bishop's Stortford. Councillor Williamson introduced the other representatives on the platform and outlined the proposed running order for the meeting. Following a slide presentation from the Electoral Services Officer, the Chair would invite Councillor Wyllie and Councillor Lumsden each to give a brief statement on the review from the perspective of their respective councils. There would then be about an hour for a 'Question Time' session based on questions that attendees had submitted prior to the meeting, followed by an opportunity to raise matters that had not been covered.

2. Slide presentation

John Williams, Electoral Services Officer for East Herts District Council, gave a slide presentation outlining the background to the community governance review and progress so far, the current consultation period on the draft recommendations and the process and timetable for concluding the review. Mr Williams stated that final decisions on the outcome of the review, including any changes to the parish boundary between Bishop's Stortford and Thorley, would be taken by East Herts District Council in October 2018. The matters raised at this meeting would be reported to District Councillors for their consideration during that process.

At the end of the presentation an attendee suggested that a show of hands be taken to ascertain whether those present supported the District Council's draft recommendations. The Chair stated that there were people who were not at the meeting who would be affected and might have a view. Therefore the meeting should be treated as a consultation where people could make their comments, but he did not feel that a show of hands would be appropriate.

3. Statement by Bishop's Stortford Town Council

The Chair invited Councillor Wyllie to address the meeting to give Bishop's Stortford Town Council's perspective on the review.

Councillor Wyllie stated that he was the Leader of Bishop's Stortford Town Council. He represented the Bishop's Stortford South Ward which included half of Thorley Park, half of St Michael's Mead and the area around the Bishop's Avenue, all of which were in Bishop's Stortford. Councillor Wyllie felt that there was confusion as to why the Town Council had requested the review. Some people had said that the Town Council was undertaking a 'land grab' in order to build on the land in question. Councillor Wyllie assured the meeting that Bishop's Stortford Town Council voted against building on the land south of Whittington Way. However, the Planning Inspector's recent report unfortunately said that the land would come out of Green Belt and up to 750 houses be built on it and, subject to the objection period, this would be the case regardless of which parish the land was situated in.

A number of attendees said that permission had not yet been obtained for such development. Councillor Wyllie clarified that the land was allocated for housing in the District Plan, which meant that it was likely that houses would be built on it.

Councillor Wyllie continued that there was also confusion about who would be affected by the boundary change proposed by the Town Council. Some residents of Thorley Park believed that they lived in Thorley Parish. However, Thorley Park was already in Bishop's Stortford so its residents would not be affected by the change.

Councillor Wyllie stated that the main reason the Town Council had proposed the boundary change was that once the land was built on, the residents would look to Bishop's Stortford as their town. Their postal town would be Bishop's Stortford, they would use Bishop's Stortford schools, train station, town centre and other services. The Town Council therefore believed it should have a say in the housing that was going to be built there.

4. Statement by Thorley Parish Council

The Chair invited Councillor Lumsden to address the meeting to give Thorley Parish Council's perspective on the review.

Councillor Lumsden referred to the initial proposal by the Town Council, which would have taken about 90% of the population of Thorley and jeopardised the viability of the Parish Council. He felt that this should never have got as far as a consultation because East Herts Council should have seen it was ridiculous and rejected it immediately. Councillor Lumsden said that in the second stage consultation East

Herts Council had realised how ridiculous the proposal was and had tried to justify it by giving back Thorley Street and other areas and sorting out anomalies, which he felt had themselves resulted from the last boundary review.

Councillor Lumsden considered that none of the options proposed so far made any sense. The land south of Whittington Way was an empty field. He questioned why the Town Council would want it if not for development, which they said was not the case. Likewise Councillor Lumsden questioned why Southern Country Park was included in the area proposed for transfer.

Councillor Lumsden then displayed plans of three alternative options for changes to the parish boundary that he felt would make more sense. He stated that if a stretch of Old Thorley Lane, which was currently in Bishop's Stortford, came back into Thorley this would avoid any cross-border problems with developments anywhere, apart from in St Michael's Mead. St Michael's Mead itself could be split better than it was at the moment by making a natural boundary, or could be taken into Bishop's Stortford by transferring just the land containing the existing housing development. Councillor Lumsden thought that the Parish Council's alternative options would satisfy all aspects of the terms of reference of the review.

Regarding East Herts Council's draft recommendations, these stated that the Council did not consider that the Town Council had provided any compelling evidence that Thorley Street and the area east of London Road should be included in Bishop's Stortford. Councillor Lumsden said this implied there were compelling reasons for the other recommendations but he could not see those. He did not feel there was any justification for the proposals in the terms of reference and stated that a large majority of respondents to the initial consultation were against them.

Councillor Lumsden stated that he was reminded of a colleague's remarks that public consultation was a legal requirement in these procedures but actually taking heed of the consultation was not. However he urged all present to go online, oppose the proposals with all the reasons that had been put forward in the context of the terms of reference for the review, and see if those making the proposals could come up with evidence that supported their cause. If they could not, Councillor Lumsden stated that they should stop the review.

At the conclusion of Councillor Lumsden's speech a resident again called for a show of hands in support of what he had said.

5. Statement by Old Thorley and Twyford Residents' Association (OTTRA)

The Chair stated that he wished to thank OTTRA who had been very helpful in first suggesting the meeting and then helping to plan and publicise it. He invited Mrs McDonald to add any points that she wished to before the Question Time session.

Mrs McDonald stated that she wanted to provide some historical information to clear up the confusion about where Thorley was. She also wanted to explain why OTTRA had taken the unusual step of using the e-petition procedure to get the District Council to call a public meeting on the boundary review process.

OTTRA had originally been founded in 1989 as Old Thorley Community Association. Its aim was to ward off a threat to Thorley, the ancient village of clustered settlements in open green belt countryside. OTTRA was acting not just for the benefit of Thorley families but for the enjoyment and well-being too of its neighbouring market town, which was equally rich in heritage.

Mrs McDonald stated that earlier boundary reviews had enabled the town of Bishop's Stortford to annex extensive stretches of parish land for developments now known as Thorley Park and St Michael's Mead; and that today the town's territorial advances were bent on reaching the bypass. Hitherto this had been slowed down by two barriers that had served to protect Thorley – the green belt and class three village status. Mrs McDonald stated that the current boundary review was an attempt by the Town Council to solve this problem by transferring more or less the whole of the Thorley electorate into the town.

In relation to the second stage consultation, Mrs McDonald felt that nothing had been done to inform the public about what was going on and there was misunderstanding amongst townspeople and villagers; and a lack of engagement with those they elected to represent them on this important issue. The deadline for responses was very close, so OTTRA had decided to do something about what they saw as a sorry democratic state of affairs. That was why the meeting had been called - not to debate whether development in Thorley should go ahead, but for everyone to participate in the Question Time and to find out from officers the truth of the situation regarding the circumstances in which boundary change would be a justifiable way in law for the town to achieve territorial gain.

Mrs McDonald stated that Thorley had already been harmed by two previous events. One was the slicing through of parish farmland by the town bypass, severing the lanes and community; and the other the 1999 electoral change which divided the parish into two wards, giving jurisdiction of 90% of Thorley's electorate to the town's South Ward at district level.

Mrs McDonald stressed that OTTRA, with membership comprising both Thorley and South Ward residents in roughly equal number, was as much concerned about Thorley Park and Old Thorley residents having access to information as it was about Thorley parishioners having the same; and that while OTTRA was pleased to see town district councillors present, it wanted them to respect OTTRA's wish that this should not be a forum for them to hold the floor, but a Question Time where all present could be informed and raise whatever concerned them.

6. 'Question Time' session

The Chair stated that the meeting would now move into a Question Time session. Attendees had been invited before the meeting to suggest questions and these had been sorted into themes and a question from each theme selected at random to open the discussion.

Question 1: After the Council's rejection of the Town's original proposals to move more than 90% of Thorley residents into the Town area, the Council's main remaining proposal is to transfer a 53 hectare agricultural field with no

residential population which lies at the heart of the Thorley village community. The reason given is that the future occupants of the 750 houses proposed for the land by East Herts Council are likely to feel part of the Bishops Stortford community. What evidence is there for this and, if the development does not proceed or is significantly delayed as Bishop's Stortford North has been (as it still has to go through the full planning procedures, which cannot start until the district plan is approved), will it be transferred back to Thorley?

Mr Williams responded that the community governance review process required the Council to take into account any likely changes in the size and distribution of the electorate over a five year period. The Council therefore had to use the best available information about where the population was likely to be living in five years' time. The site in question was allocated for housing by the district plan and current projections were that some of that development would have taken place across the current parish boundary by 2023. It would be desirable for the whole development to be in one parish and councillors had felt that the character of the development was likely to be that of an urban extension to Bishop's Stortford and that the population would use the town centre services and feel part of the town.

As to the position if the development did not go ahead, Mr Williams stated that community governance was not set in stone and that if the situation changed, there would be the possibility of a further review in future.

Mr Parker stated that in relation to evidence to support the Town Council's proposal, there were two analogous areas at Thorley Park and St Michael's Mead, which could be seen as the Bishop's Stortford South of twenty years ago, i.e. new urban extensions on what was previously farmland. Residents of those areas now used the services provided by Bishop's Stortford Town Council extensively but those living in the part of St Michael's Mead that was outside of Bishop's Stortford did not contribute financially to those services. Mr Parker felt that there was fairly clear evidence that urban extensions to the town did effectively become part of the town.

An attendee stated that residents of Thorley Park and St Michael's Mead also used Thorley Church, the St Barnabas Centre and other facilities in Thorley, so it was a two-way process.

The questioner stated that his understanding of the latest position from reading the District Plan Inspector's decision was that the site was unlikely to be developed at all until 2021/22 and that the previous evening East Herts Council's Executive approved a framework masterplan under which the first area of development would be 142 houses on Whittington Way in a narrow strip of land which was already in the Town Council's area. He therefore felt that the review was entirely premature and that there was plenty of time to undertake another review when and if the rest of the development came forward.

The Chair confirmed that the item mentioned had been considered by the Executive and whilst he did not have every detail of the plan to hand, he asked officers whether the information provided made a material difference to the situation. Mr Williams confirmed that the final decisions would be made at the October Council meeting and that any material changes to the evidence that had been available in May would

be reported to that meeting and taken into account as part of the final decision making process.

An attendee stated that in his understanding the guidance was written in the past tense and that reviews should not anticipate development. Reviews could be held at any time, there was no requirement to do so now and no guarantee that the development concerned would take place.

Another attendee stated that despite the councils' claims to the contrary, many local people believed that the review was linked to development.

Ms Watts stated that the reason East Herts Council was conducting the review was because it was asked by the Town Council to do so. The District Council had a legal responsibility to consider that proposal and having started the review, to finish it within a year. The first stage of the consultation had finished and the second stage was underway. As Mr Williams had said, if there were material changes that people wished to comment on in the second stage, which was quite possible as things do change, then those points should be made during the second stage of the consultation and would be taken forward to the October meeting.

An attendee stated that the original request from the Town Council was made in 2015, when it was even less certain that this development would take place. He asked therefore why the District Council had not simply told the Town Council to wait. Ms Watts stated that from the District Council's perspective having been asked to do the review it would have been difficult to say that the Council would not even consider it because while people on both sides of the argument had views, to ignore the views of one side would have appeared unfair. So the Council undertook the review in good faith and Ms Watts pointed out that some development had already happened in parts of the area, for example at St Michael's Mead, that had created anomalies which required consideration.

Question 2: What does the Town Council provide to the town, that wouldn't be provided by the Parish Council to those in the Parish Council area? You seem to think that the people living in Thorley Parish are aliens and that any new residents of the Bishop's Stortford South site will want to be part of Bishop's Stortford town, but residents of Thorley Parish feel part of Thorley but have a Bishop's Stortford address and use the town for other things, so what is the difference?

Another attendee stated that the process had not taken into account residents of South Ward, who she felt did not receive facilities from the Town Council and would now be expected to cross the busy Whittington Way to a new community centre. She stated that the Town Council did not provide for the existing residents of South Ward but it was now suggested that there would be another 750 houses in the ward. Other attendees commented that there was currently no community centre or church in South Ward and that elected representatives were not often seen in the area.

Councillor Wyllie stated that many electors did not want councillors to be knocking on their door frequently, but he had been in the attendee's part of town recently and local councillors could be seen in the local shops and amenities.

Regarding service provision, Councillor Wyllie responded that the Town Council looked at the town as a whole. It provided £250,000 to the Rhodes Centre, a tourist information centre, green spaces including Sworder's Field, the council offices etc. It was difficult to split the provision by ward because most of the money was spent in Central Ward as that was where the facilities were. It wasn't possible to have a church or a community centre in every ward but the Town Council provided many facilities for the town.

In response to a comment about building communities, Councillor Wyllie stated that the community was the people of Bishop's Stortford, and that the bigger councils were able to provide more services because more people were contributing to them. No one was prevented from using services but he believed that the people who would move into the Bishop's Stortford South site would look to the town.

A number of attendees stated that any development was subject to the planning process. Councillor Wyllie agreed and pointed out that Bishop's Stortford Town Council didn't build anything or give planning permission. East Herts Council was the planning authority. No one wanted the site to be built on but Bishop's Stortford Town Council was just saying that the people who would live in this urban extension to Bishop's Stortford would look towards Bishop's Stortford. The fact that the land was allocated for housing suggested that development would take place and the County Council was also looking at putting a school on the site.

Councillor Wyllie stated that the Town Council was happy with the compromise that had now been proposed which would see St Michael's Mead and the Bishop's Stortford South field moving into Bishop's Stortford and everything else staying in Thorley Parish. The Town Council did not want to see Thorley Parish disappear.

Question 3: The Friends of Southern Country Park are very interested to see what potential impact this is going to have on the Country Park. Most of us were not aware that the park was proposed to transfer. Our primary partner is East Herts Council and we would very much like that relationship to continue into the future because it works very well. Now it is proposed that the Town Council would be responsible for that area in the future so we would like to know what the impact would be, both in the short term and in the long term?

Ms Watts responded that the District Council was not proposing any changes to the way in which Southern Country Park was managed. The Council and the Friends of the Park would still have the same relationship and the District Council would remain responsible for the park.

An attendee asked in that case, why was it proposed to change the boundary? She compared the management of Southern Country Park favourably with other green spaces in the town that were run by the Town Council.

Mr Parker agreed that the Friends Group worked well and stated that as part of the Castle Park project the Town Council was looking to form a Friends Group for Sworder's Field and Castle Gardens. But he referred to Ms Watts' statement that the Country Park would remain in East Herts District Council ownership and stated

that the Town Council had no aspirations whatsoever to interfere with the current successful management of the Country Park. The proposal was to change the electoral boundary but there were many things within every parish that were not the responsibility of the parish or town council.

An attendee said that the map showing the area proposed for transfer included not only Southern Country Park but also a small triangle of land that was not either the area proposed for development or the Country Park and this had not been mentioned either. In her view there was no reason for either of these pieces of land to go into the jurisdiction of the town.

Mr Williams stated that this was a consultation process and that the view expressed was exactly the type of point that would be relevant to that consultation. If people felt that any part of the recommendations were wrong, he encouraged them to say so with as much supporting evidence as possible as part of the consultation, the whole purpose of which was to hear the community's views. Mr Williams pointed out that the first stage of consultation had resulted in quite a large section of the Town Council's suggested area for transfer being taken out of it. All of the points made during the second stage consultation would be reported to East Herts Council, which would base its judgement on the evidence that was provided.

Councillor Lumsden stated that if the development went ahead on what they call Bishop's Stortford South, all of the residents would want to be part of Thorley. He said that this statement had as much depth as the contrary statement that had already been made and either could be true. Councillor Lumsden said that he could at least understand why the Town Council would wish to take over an area allocated for development. Regarding Southern Country Park however, he could not understand that and he believed that all local residents were against it. He urged all present to go online and register their opposition to the proposal.

Question 4: What are the key documents? The Parish Council did not know. Some were passed on by John Williams but would not have been generally available to all members of the public.

The questioner explained that at stage one of the consultation she had visited each of the stated venues but found no information on the review. When she had then called East Herts Council the electoral services team knew nothing about it and customer services had referred her first to the Town Council and more recently to planning. Mr Williams had passed on some documents to her but she was still concerned that some key documents, in particular the electorate forecasts for South Ward, were incorrect in that they were available on the website but were undated. In addition Hertford archives could not provide a larger map. The questioner had spent many hours trying to get information. In addition the terms of reference were incorrect as they said the second consultation would finish on 20th July.

Mr Williams apologised that the questioner had had a wasted journey to a number of different offices at the very start of the review. He reiterated that the Council had tried to use as wide a range of channels as possible for both parts of the consultation and that all of the premises mentioned – the tourist information centre, the Town Council, Parish Council, library and District Council offices were provided with copies

of the consultation documents at both the first and second stages and asked to inform the office when they required further stocks. Mr Williams assured the questioner that the customer services team at East Herts Council had been briefed on the review and that all members of the electoral services team did know about the review. On the wider issue, as well as the premises mentioned, the Council had mailed leaflets to a range of community organisations and venues and asked them to display them, in addition to the online consultation that was going on in parallel with the hard copy leaflets.

With regard to electorate forecasts, these had been updated between the first and second stages because the Council needed to know the latest information when making decisions, and electors needed to know it when responding to the consultation. The questioner stated that she was referring to 'Appendix E' and that documents were undated. Mr Williams clarified that this was an appendix to the Council report in May 2018 and included the most recent information.

Mr Williams stated that for people who didn't want to use the online consultation, hard copies of the consultation response form were available at the meeting so that residents could tell the Council their views on the various aspects of the review.

The questioner raised a supplementary issue about residents of South Ward. The Council had not delivered leaflets to each individual property in South Ward apparently on grounds of cost and that those residents would not be affected. OTTRA felt this was a huge omission and had therefore delivered leaflets themselves as they felt the residents were directly involved. The questioner also felt that the proposals regarding Park View Cottages were a mess because they did not include the properties on both sides of London Road.

Mr Williams asked that any specific comments should be made as part of the consultation response. Regarding the consultation process itself, South Ward was not excluded – there were many ways in which people were invited to make comments – but individual delivery of leaflets to properties was undertaken at both stages for every property that was potentially affected directly by the proposal, i.e. could move from one parish to another.

Another attendee felt that the review would affect everybody in Bishop's Stortford and asked why leaflets were not distributed to every property in the town? She stated that she lived in South Ward on the edge of Thorley and had got her leaflet from OTTRA and not the Council. She had often had to go to the Council to get services provided and asked how residents could be expected to be associated with Bishop's Stortford if the council and councillors didn't even know of their existence?

Question 5: The guidance on community governance reviews states that in making your decision you need to take account of the views of local people. What evidence is there that you have done this thus far?

The Chair gave the example of the meeting as an opportunity for people to state their views. The questioner agreed but stated that publicity had been poor and that some may consider that was deliberate. The Chair assured the questioner that was not the case. Mr Williams made the point that a large number of people had

responded to the first round of consultation and this did not suggest that people were unaware of the review or the consultation. The good attendance at the meeting also backed this up. He again thanked OTTRA for helping with the publicity for the meeting.

Other attendees stated that it was OTTRA and the Parish Council, rather than the District Council, who had publicised the meeting and the review; and that the six-monthly Community Voice meetings had been stopped.

The questioner added that Thorley Parish Council was responsible for Thorley Cricket Ground which was within Bishop's Stortford. He therefore didn't see any reason why Southern Country Park could not maintain its current status.

Question 6: Can the date in the terms of reference be changed as the leaflet cites 27 July 2018?

Mr Williams responded that the terms of reference had not been changed and did not need to be. He advised that the draft terms of reference, shared with the town and parish councils for their comments, envisaged the second round of consultation finishing on the 20 July. The final published version however simply stated 'July' in order to provide flexibility to ensure that there was time for everybody to make their views known. The second stage consultation leaflets fixed the closing date as 27 July.

An attendee stated that the closing date was now very soon and requested an extension so that people had time to inform themselves about the issues and make a good response.

Another attendee stated that he lived in Thorley Street and he only found out about the public meeting three days earlier by OTTRA dropping a leaflet through his letter box. He felt that the Council had been negligent in its democratic duties to the people of Thorley Street and Bishop's Stortford.

The Chair stated that the meeting had been arranged at short notice. He again acknowledged OTTRA's help with organising and publicising the event.

An attendee suggested that the whole review should be cancelled and started again due to what he saw as flaws in the democratic procedures. The Chair reminded the meeting that the review had to be completed within 12 months from the start in February. Another attendee stated that the consultation had shown there was a need to change the terms of reference and the Council was the body that decided whether the proposal would go through.

Mr Williams confirmed that by law once the Council had started a community governance review it had to complete that review within 12 months. However, the outcome of the review could be a number of different things and it would certainly be open to the Council in October to take no action and agree the outcome of the review as no change. Whether or not that would be the case would be a matter for the councillors of East Herts Council when they met in October 2018.

A resident of Thorley Park stated that if he was going to do something that would impact his next door neighbour, he would have a chat with them first. However it appeared that Bishop's Stortford Town Council had embarked on this review without consulting anybody in Thorley Parish Council first. He felt that if they had done so, some of the heated discussions at the meeting could have been avoided.

Another attendee asked what was in the Town Council's mind when it put forward its original proposal to leave Thorley with just 47 electors? He stated that they could not possibly have thought that would not affect the long term viability of Thorley.

Other attendees stated that in their view Bishop's Stortford Town Council had behaved in the style of 'big brother' towards their smaller neighbour in Thorley; and that they believed the purpose of the exercise was to remove the grade three village of Thorley.

Councillor Wyllie stated that he agreed with the questioner that Bishop's Stortford Town Council failed when they did not consult Thorley Parish Council before the review and that they should have done so. He explained that the proposal originally came from a review of the Town Council's own ward boundaries within the town that was intended to tidy up anomalies such as Tanners Wharf and elsewhere. This led to discussion of St Michael's Mead which was 85% in Bishop's Stortford and 15% in Thorley Parish. As was mentioned earlier boundaries normally follow a railway, river, or road so the distributor road was identified as a suitable boundary. However Councillor Wyllie accepted that the Town Council could have handled the matter better. Nevertheless in response to comments that the review was to enable the building of houses, Councillor Wyllie reiterated that Bishop's Stortford Town Council did not build houses or have any control over where houses go. That was the responsibility of East Herts Council. Bishop's Stortford Town Council did not want any more houses and had voted against Bishop's Stortford South being built on.

An attendee referred to a number of Town Councillors who also served as District Councillors. Councillor Wyllie stated that he had voted against Bishop's Stortford South coming out of green belt, as had Councillor Diane Hollebon who was another South Ward councillor.

Councillor Wyllie pointed out that residents of other towns in the district also felt that too many houses were being built in their areas. In fact he understood that Hertford had had more new dwellings over the past five years than Bishop's Stortford had.

Councillor Lumsden stated that when it was first known that a governance review would take place the Parish Council had looked at the records to find out when and why the Town Council had asked for the review. He stated that the review was first mooted by Mr Parker at a meeting in 2014 at which three members of the Council were present. No chairman was present so the meeting had to elect a member into the chair in order to agree the request.

Mr Parker clarified that he was an officer of the Town Council and not a councillor. It was therefore not for him to make decisions on boundary reviews. His role was to support members in developing their ideas and to implement their decisions. At members' request he had presented them with a number of options and that was on

record, but at the end of the day those matters were members' decisions, just as the final decision on this boundary review would not be taken by Ms Watts but by elected members of East Herts Council.

An attendee asked whether it was correct that Mr Parker had at some stage advised the Town Council that a boundary review wasn't necessary? Mr Parker stated that this was incorrect. It was not his role to determine whether or not a review was necessary and at no point did he suggest to the Town Council a boundary review was not necessary.

7. Any other points

The Chair stated that the meeting was very nearly out of time but, as indicated at the start, he wished to give anyone who had any comments, questions or points that had not already been made the opportunity to raise them briefly now.

An attendee asked whether East Herts Council could supply the Parish Councillors and OTTRA with copies of the Planning Inspector's report. Ms Watts stated that this could be arranged if the relevant contact details were provided.

An attendee asked who had reported the numbers of responses received during the first stage consultation back to East Herts Council, whilst another attendee stated that 960 people had objected but nobody listened.

Mr Williams stated that responses to the first stage of the consultation were returned to him and he submitted a report to the East Herts District Council meeting setting out all of the responses that had been received. This included a petition of over 900 signatures opposing the change, and there were roughly 125 individual responses of which the large majority also opposed the changes. In reaching their draft recommendations, councillors took into account the volume of responses and also the points that were made and supporting evidence provided; and the areas that responses came from.

An attendee stated that consultations should take into account anyone who lives, works or studies in the area, regardless of age. This had not been made clear. She felt that consultation should be about listening, but some panel members were talking about compromise as though they had already heard the second stage of consultation. In her view East Herts Council was not listening or consulting properly, in contrast to some other councils. She stated that it was illegal to hold a consultation on something that was already decided.

Another attendee stated that eight years ago he had been a member of an unofficial committee that had investigated members' expenses and that he did not trust councillors to listen to what the residents had said.

8. Closing remarks

The Chair reminded all present that consultation forms were available at the meeting and could be left with officers after completion, or residents could go online to respond to the consultation.

An attendee asked the Chair whether the questions asked and answers given could be posted on the Council's website. The Chair agreed to this.

An attendee asked the Chair what messages he would take from the meeting and what action the Council would take in response. The Chair stated that he could not say because nothing had yet been decided and the Council would approach the results of the second stage consultation with an open mind in considering whether they should take a different view from the one they took in May. He pointed out that the Council had listened to the arguments in the first stage consultation by making a different recommendation about the land east of London Road.

Mrs McDonald on behalf of OTTRA thanked Mr Williams for his help in arranging the meeting at short notice. She stated that she had thought the meeting would be for residents to talk to officers and she did not think that the attendance of councillors had helped with the discussion. Mrs McDonald encouraged all present to respond to the second stage consultation and asked if the printed response forms could be made available more widely to residents including those in South Ward and elsewhere who cannot or do not use the internet.

Mr Williams stated that he would be happy to make copies of the printed form available in the Council offices and in the other venues previously mentioned that had the consultation leaflets. He also pointed out that the consultation had never been an entirely online exercise and there had always been the option to send a letter or written response by post.

Mrs McDonald asked whether the closure date for the consultation could be extended in order to provide more time for residents to obtain the forms and respond. Mr Williams agreed that the consultation could be extended for an additional two weeks beyond the current 27 July deadline. He agreed that a press release would be issued to publicise this extension.

An attendee suggested that the Chairman of the Parish Council should write to Mark Prisk MP and the Boundary Commission to inform them of the high level of opposition to the proposed changes. Councillor Lumsden stated that he had already written as a local resident to Mr Prisk in those terms. Mrs McDonald stated that she had also informed Mr Prisk about the meeting, along with Councillor Devonshire who was the district representative for Thorley.

The Chair thanked everyone present for their attendance and closed the meeting at 8.57 p.m.

APPENDIX: QUESTIONS SUBMITTED IN ADVANCE BUT UNASKED AT THE PUBLIC MEETING

- Paragraph 2.4 of the terms of reference states that the Council (assume EHDC) is mindful that proposals which are intended to reflect community identity and local linkages should be justified in terms of sound and demonstrable evidence of those identities and linkages. Where is there any evidence from EHDC or BS Town Council of sound and demonstrable evidence of those identities and linkages based on the proposed new boundaries – in particular Bish 5 and Southern Country Park?
- The report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer to the Council meeting on 16 May 2018 states at paragraph 1.2 'Boundary alterations between existing parishes'. This is not listed at paragraph 1.8 of the terms of reference. If it is not listed in TOF can it still be part of the review?
- Paragraph 2.2 of the terms of reference talks about transparency but paragraph 3.1 doesn't include ALL committee meetings and dates. Why were other meetings that the public may have wished to attend where the consultation was being discussed or debated omitted?
- Can Cllr Williamson explain why, in the Independent, he says that the CGR will not affect the determination of development proposals, and that Thorley would remain a Group 3 village when the District Plan defines a Group 3 village as a village or settlement subject to the Group 3 Villages Policy (Vill3) rather than the various town policies such as BISH5?
- M25 394 proforma letters – the proposed changes do not demonstrate any of the terms of reference. Why were these letters not taken as evidence of concerns and issues as part of the consultation process?
- Why do we insist on keep visiting an argument that has been rejected time and time again? Do people really want to live under a flight path?
- Do our councillors represent the electorate views & can we trust them?
- Is it democratic to try to push through boundary change for an empty field when it is clearly against the wishes of the local electorate?
- The recent Inspectors Report on the District Plan now states that the first of the 200-250 'new [BISH5] homes are not anticipated to be delivered until 2021/22.' The Masterplan Framework, now agreed by the Council, yesterday, has announced that the first phase will be 142 houses (around 300 electors) on the small area bordering Whittington Way already in the town. Since the remaining 60-110 new houses (120-220 electors) will not arrive on Thorley Parish land until 2023 and the rest of the 500 houses by 2031, wouldn't boundary changes better await a later CGR review, when the development programme is clearer? Also,

has the need to carry out development in an area controlled by the Town Council already affected the phasing of development?

- Paragraph 4.1 of the terms of reference of the review talks about whether there would be a need for any change to parish boundaries and/or electoral arrangements. Why would any responses trying to identify that in their opinion there would not be a need for some of the proposed boundary changes by omitted a choice of NO CHANGE as opposed to DO NOT KNOW?
- The area proposed for development is described by the Council as an 'urban extension ... more in common with the town'. However, the masterplan recently published by Countryside Properties describes the development as a 'new village'. If development did go ahead wouldn't a 'new village' be more appropriate in Thorley?
- How does the council arrive at the projection in the council leaflet that 500 new residents will be housed on the Whittington Way development site by February 2023? Will they be housed on the strip of the site already belonging to the town South Ward or on annexed Thorley Parish land?
- The report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer to the Council meeting on 16 May 2018 states at paragraph 2.1 (II) 'Developments are, or will be seen by residents as part of BS Town Council', and paragraph 7.9 states 'The Town Council suggests that residents of these urban extensions are likely to feel part of the Bishop's Stortford community.' Where is the evidence that this meets Terms of Reference 2.4 that this statement meets the requirement that they can justify this in terms of sound and demonstrable evidence of those identities and linkages?
- Can they explain why if it is not a land grab for building purposes why the BSTC are so keen to gain authority of the field?
- Can we be told what the Inspector said about Thorley being a C 3 village?
- We note that with respect to growth in the Gilston area, sustainable transport can be provided until 2033 given that a number of upgrades take place to M11 junctions, a second Stort crossing, and local roads. In particular, rat running will be discouraged on rural lanes surrounding the site. What discussions are taking place with respect to growth in Thorley, will the measures taken in Gilston benefit Thorley Street traffic, and what are the plans to relieve Pig Lane of pressure that will increase as a result of development in the north of town as well as that in Thorley where school traffic will add to traffic movement problems?