

## Peterchurch Community Governance Review

### Phase 1 Consultation Response

From 13 February to the 6 April, Herefordshire Council conducted a parish wide consultation with the community of Peterchurch parish in connection with their community governance review. The community were asked to provide their views on increasing the number of parish council seats by one, raising the total number of parish councillors from 8 to 9 to accommodate current and future population growth. The initial stage of the review was to find out local views prior to a full consultation.

The consultation was made available for anyone to respond to on-line via Herefordshire Council website. Hard copies were made available on request. The consultation was also promoted using social media, local newsletters and the parish council web-site.

#### **Consultation response:**

36 responses to the Peterchurch questionnaire were received. Of the responses received 30 supported the parish council's proposals to increase the number of parish council seats by one while 6 of the responses were not in favour of this change. This equates to 83.3% of respondents being in favour of an increase in parish councillors, with 16.6% not being in favour.

The principal evidence offered to support the proposed increase of parish council seats by one can be summarised as follows:

- *Several respondents expressed support for an extra parish councillor to help manage future population growth*
- *A number of views expressed a hope that this change would encourage people to stand who have new ideas and thinking for the parish to consider*
- *That there would be fairer voting within the council as there would be a more representative view of the community and that having an uneven number of councillors would make voting simpler*
- *That increasing the number of councillors will aid in debate, experience and knowledge of the council and make for a better decision making process and democratic accountability.*

The evidence offered in opposition to the proposed increase of parish council seats by one can be summarised with two principal contentions:

- *A concern that the parish council is not visible, consultative or active in the community – it was suggested that it would be difficult to justify increasing the number of seats as a result*
- *An observation that the parish council spend is quite high and a contention that increasing the number of councillors might push that spend up further.*

National government guidance notes that 'Council size is the term used to describe the number of councillors to be elected to the whole council. The 1972 Act, as amended, specifies that each parish council must have at least five councillors; there is no maximum number. There are no rules relating to the allocation of those councillors between parish wards but each parish ward, and each parish grouped under a common parish council, must have at least one parish councillor.

The Government's guidance also states that 'each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities' and therefore the Council is prepared to pay particular attention to existing levels of representation, the broad pattern of existing council sizes which have stood the test of time and the take-up of seats at elections in its consideration of this matter.

**Recommendation:** The balance of evidence indicates that there are sufficient grounds to progress to formally increasing the number of parish council seats by one, raising the total number of parish councillors from 8 to 9 to accommodate current and future population growth.

## **Peterchurch Community Governance Review**

### **Phase 2 Consultation Response**

From 11 May to 29 June, Herefordshire Council conducted a parish wide consultation with the community in Peterchurch on their community governance review proposals. This followed a first wave of consultation where the community were asked to provide their views as to whether Peterchurch Parish Council should increase the number of parish council seats by one, raising the total number of parish councillors from 8 to 9 to accommodate current and future population growth. Following the first phase of consultation consultees were supportive of this proposal by a margin of 83.3% of respondents being in favour of an increase in parish councillors, with 16.6% not being in favour. This was based on 36 responses received.

#### **Phase 2 Consultation.**

A second phase of consultation was undertaken to test levels of community support or opposition for increasing the number of parish council seats from 8 to 9. The consultation was open to anyone to respond to on-line via Herefordshire Council website. Hard copies were made available on request and circulated to local residents. The consultation was also targeted to local residents and promoted using social media, local newsletters and the parish council web-site.

The metrics from the social media campaigns indicate that 2,833 people received details of the Peterchurch community governance review consultations and fact sheets. This generated 169 'clicked links' through to the consultation pages.

#### **Consultation response:**

Fifteen responses to the Peterchurch phase 2 consultation questionnaire were received. Of the responses received 11 respondents were supportive of the parish council's proposals to increase the number of parish council seats by one while 4 of the responses were not in favour of this change. This equates to 73.3% of respondents being in favour of an increase in parish council seats, with 26.6% not being in favour.

The principal evidence consultees offered in support of the proposed change related to a belief that increasing the number of parish seats would encourage more people to engage with local decisions and that, as the population grows, there will be more parish councillors to deal with expected increasing demands placed on the community. Others noted the potential for a new seat to encourage candidates who would bring new focus and fresh ideas to the parish council. A sample of some of those responses are highlighted below.

- *This will engage more of the parish in community representation*

*(Individual from Peterchurch Community)*

- *More councillors spreads out the jobs*

*(Individual from Peterchurch Community)*

- *It will help with the important issues in the community*

*(Individual from Peterchurch Community)*

- Will give extra input and new focus

*(Individual from Peterchurch Community)*

Of the four responses in opposition to the proposed increase in council seats only two responses contextualised their position. There were two principal contentions noted. The first related to a concern that the parish council was not responsive to community needs. A second contention was that there was already an adequate number of parish councillors to deal with parish business.

- The parish council as it is don't seem to listen to the community as it is

*(Individual from Peterchurch Community)*

- Too many already

*(Individual from Peterchurch Community)*

### Triangulation with other sources of advice.

National government guidance notes that 'Council size is the term used to describe the number of councillors to be elected to the whole council. The 1972 Act, as amended, specifies that each parish council must have at least five councillors; there is no maximum number. There are no rules relating to the allocation of those councillors between parish wards but each parish ward, and each parish grouped under a common parish council, must have at least one parish councillor.

The Government's guidance also states that 'each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities' and therefore the Council is prepared to pay particular attention to existing levels of representation, the broad pattern of existing council sizes which have stood the test of time and the take-up of seats at elections in its consideration of this matter.

Parishes wishing to increase numbers must give strong reasons for doing so. The number of parish/town councillors for each council must be not less than five but can be greater. However, each parish grouped under a common parish council must have at least one parish councillor. The Aston Business School found the following levels of representation to the good running of a council:

| Electors         | Councillors |
|------------------|-------------|
| Less than 500    | 5-8         |
| 501-2,500        | 6-12        |
| 2,501-10,000     | 9-16        |
| 10,001-20,000    | 13-27       |
| More than 20,000 | 13-31       |

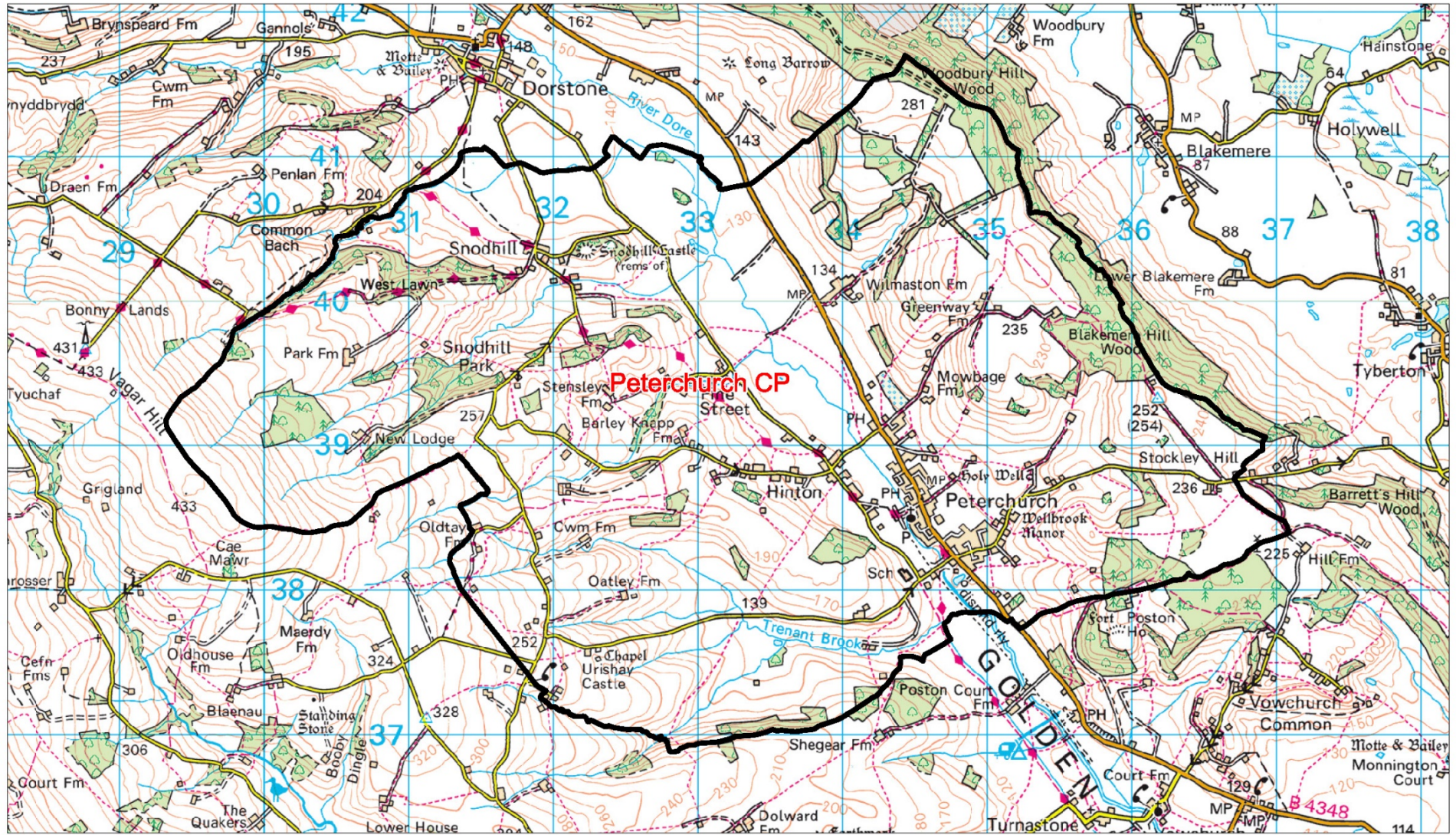
The population of Peterchurch<sup>1</sup> is currently 1,112. On this basis increasing the number of seats from 8 to 9 means that the parish council remains within expected representation levels.

**Recommendation:** *The number of seats on Peterchurch parish council be increased from 8 to 9 to accommodate current and future population growth, and that the electoral arrangements will remain unchanged in all other respects*

**Resource implications:** There may be a small elevation in the costs of local elections in the parish of Peterchurch as a result of increasing the number of parish seats from 8 to 9. Parish elections take place every four years, the costs of which are re-charged back to Herefordshire Council by the parishes. A small amount of staff time will be required to update the electoral register to record this change.

<sup>1</sup> Source: ONS © Crown copyright 2017

# Peterchurch parish map.



Herefordshire Council

## PLAN - PETERCHURCH PARISH SCALE 1:25000

NORTH

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Parish Boundary