

Community Governance Review: Longtown Group Parish

From 13 February to the 6 April, Herefordshire Council conducted a parish wide consultation with the community of Longtown group parish in connection with their community governance review. The community were asked to provide their views on the potential interest in separating the parish of Walterstone from the Longtown group and instead amalgamating Walterstone with the Ewyas Harold Group Parish. This would result in a parish boundary change.

The initial consultation was to test local views as to whether this was an option that the community would support, prior to a full consultation being undertaken.

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

Consultation response:

The council received two responses to the consultation which were supportive of the proposals to de-group Walterstone from the Longtown group parish and amalgamate it with the Ewyas Harold Group Parish Council. The principal reason in support of the proposal noted that some of the properties within the parish of Walterstone share a closer geographic and community connection with the Ewyas Harold group area.

There was not support for the proposed boundary change which would see the whole of the Walterstone parish moved into the Ewyas Harold group parish. It was instead suggested that some parts of Walterstone look towards Longtown naturally and not Ewyas Harold. There were also observations made that some of the properties within the Walterstone parish currently fall within Longtown parish but are part of the Walterstone community. These would be better included in Walterstone parish with the boundary running approximately along the ridge of Mynydd Myrddin.

This would suggest that the respondents may be in favour of some form of realignment of the Walterstone parish and a possible splitting of the parish in to two respective parts.

The result of the first wave consultation highlighted that the original proposal, which was to move the entire parish of Walterstone out of the Longtown group and into the Ewyas Harold group parish was not supported by the community. Instead

At the request of the Longtown group parish council and in discussions with the ward member for Golden Valley South, a meeting of Longtown group parish was held on 19 June with Herefordshire Council invited. At that meeting parish councillors noted some concerns at the low number of consultation responses received and - linked to this – the impact of undertaking further consultation within the community on splitting the parish of Walterstone. This, if enacted, would have the effect of abolishing the parish. The parish council identified that further background consultation with the community would be needed before any further formal steps be taken as part of the governance review. Options on ways forward were considered at that meeting and included:

- Running further consultation on new proposals to split the parish of Walterstone along the lines advocated by respondents to the phase 1 consultation;
- Running a further consultation to propose no further change at the current time, or

- Terminating the current CGR with a view that further engagement with the community be carried out.

Triangulation of this consultation response.

It is desirable that any changes do not upset historic traditions but do reflect changes that have happened over time, such as population shift or additional development, which may have led to a different community identity. In rural areas, the Government wants to encourage the involvement of local people in developing their community and having a part to play in shaping the decisions that affect them.

It is clear that while there was some support within the Longtown group parish for the original proposed changes, there is much weaker support for the proposals advocated in the consultation responses. The evidence indicates that there is further engagement work to be undertaken with the Longtown and Ewyas Harold group parishes to gain a clearer understanding on the specific boundary and parish changes being advocated.

Through discussion with the ward member and Longtown group parish a clear preference to undertake further engagement work exists with a view to re-visiting the option of a community governance review at a later stage.

Recommendation: *No changes be made to Longtown group parish council.*

Alternative options: To conduct further consultation under the current terms of reference. This is not recommended as the existing terms of reference are not reflective of the change being advocated following the phase 1 consultation. To undertake further consultation at this stage risks splitting community opinion in ways that may be counterproductive and contentious. It may rule out the option of undertaking a future community governance review in 2021, at which point there may be a more clear community view as to what change, if any, they wish to see. And finally, given the timeframes within which a review must be conducted (one year), to consult on what is a potentially complex change at a relatively late stage within the review would not be advisable.

Resource implications: There are no financial or staff costs arising from this recommendation.