
Ongar

Town Council



Mark Squire
Town Clerk



Mr Ian Willett
Assistant to the Chief Executive
Epping Forest District Council
Civic Offices
High Street
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CM16 4BZ

10th February 2010

Dear Mr Willett,

Re Greensted Ward – Ongar

I refer to our recent meetings and the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) meeting of 3rd November 2009, specifically motion 91 regarding the 'Greensted Parish Ward'.

I have taken this opportunity to provide some input on behalf of Ongar Town Council (OTC).

On the 24th November 2009, I wrote to all residents within the Greensted Ward on behalf of OTC regarding potential boundary changes to ascertain the underlying feelings of residents and whether they had any particular grievances or issues to discuss. In the letter (copy attached) OTC sought their views, comments and opinions and also offered to arrange a meeting to enable a discussion between residents and local councillors if so required.

OTC wrote to all 291 residences in the Greensted Ward and received a very low response from some 21 households (either by letter, e-mail or phone call), representing a return of 7.2%. No residents specifically requested a public meeting with the council.

I received only 4 communications 'for' a boundary change which consisted of two letters and an e-mail emanating from Greensted Road addresses and one phonecall from the resident who had initially instigated the motion of a boundary change.

I received feedback from 18 residents, requesting no change to existing boundaries and 1 ambiguous reply seeking further information.

I have attached copies of all communications for your perusal.

On the 14th January 2010 OTC met with EFDC District Councillors Derek Jacobs and Glynn Pritchard, who represent Ongar. The objective was to understand the rationale behind the proposed changes to the Greensted Ward boundary, to discuss the implications of the potential changes, to air the concerns of OTC and to hear their views of the District Councillors themselves.

OTC expressed to the two District Councillors its disappointment that they had not contacted this Council when the issue was first raised and had only been informed when Cllr Pritchard phoned the office and then forwarded a copy of a letter he had sent to the Clerk of Stanford

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Rivers some time previously. OTC was also under the impression that Moreton Parish Council was consulted before OTC was informed of the action taken by him.

OTC would ask EFDC to consider carefully the following points at the next relevant meeting when the 'Greensted issue is discussed further:-

- From information gathered to date, there appears to be little evidence to suggest or support that there is any real feeling or impetus from the Greensted Ward for a boundary change.
- Rather there would appear be a concerted effort for change by an individual/very small number of residents.
- The sixty or so houses mentioned in previous correspondence as part of the rural area represents a fifth of the ward which is a significant percentage.
- Costs are likely to be considerable and the boundary review could foreseeably extend to the 3 other Wards in Ongar, with a potential 'knock-on' effect to six neighbouring parishes surrounding Ongar.
- There is a danger that an isolated request incurs costs for the majority of residents. Is this serving the best interests of local democracy?
- How would the proposed boundary change be more effective for the residents of the Greensted Ward? What are the perceive benefits?
- Community governance arrangements should reflect people across the whole community and not just a discrete cross section or small part of it.
- What would be the 'knock-on' affect in terms of electoral representation, precept levy and number of councillors per ward, all with further cost implications?
- How would any potential changes fit into the respective Parishes timetables for Parish elections?

OTC strongly believes that it has served the Greensted Ward well:-

- Whilst OTC is not primarily responsible for the highway in Greensted, OTC has consistently chased EFDC and Essex County Council ECC (and continues to do so) for further road improvements in Greensted. The most recent meeting was on the 30th November 2009, where the Chairman and Clerk met with Gerard McEwen ECC, District Councillor- Ongar and Rural, David Forkin, Area Highways Manager EFDC and Trevor Baker, District Manager EFDC to reiterate the problem.
- OTC has achieved an extension of the speed limit further along the Greensted Road.
- OTC has achieved additional road signage and a white line marking on the centre of the road.
- The neighbouring parishes of Stanford Rivers and Moreton and Bobbingworth have previously declined OTC's request to join OTC in the campaign for road improvements.
- Essex Police have maintained that the road is very windy and that speed limits are unenforceable. As such they have declined to implement speed cameras.
- Due to difficulties being experienced by the company contracted to deliver OTC's quarterly newsletter these have, for the past two years, been posted to all residents in the outer lying residents in all the Council's rural areas, including Greensted Ward, to ensure each household receives a copy

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- Chairmen of OTC, Chairs of Environment Committee as well as Greensted Ward councillors have often met with the resident who has request this boundary change to discuss traffic issues. Also the issues have been discussed at more than one Annual Town meeting. OTC has been pursuing ECC Highways for improvements for at least 30 years which has resulted in the successes detailed earlier
- Historically OTC has contributed towards the upkeep of Greensted Church.

OTC has not sensed any disquiet from the residents of Greensted. On a personal level, having completed one year as Town Clerk, from memory, I have only receive one complaint from a Greensted resident complaining about the speed limits along Greensted Road during this time.

OTC is highly supportive of the needs of the residents of Greensted Ward who like all Ongar residents, have been are invited to all council meetings, the Annual Town Meeting as well as open councillor surgeries that have been running for some time now. The issue of a 'boundary change' has not been raised at any of these events.

OTC is aware that much of its area is rural where the needs may be different from the more urban parts of the town. It feels that has a long history of recognising and responding to those needs.

Whilst OTC cannot justify the promotion of boundary changes, the council does wish to reflect the interests of the community in the Greensted area and if there are minor boundary anomalies, OTC would be pleased to take this into consideration. It is feasible that if a comprehensive boundary review is undertaken, there may be a rationale to expand OTC's current boundaries to more natural barriers (rivers, roads, railways etc), but again OTC is mindful of the cost to the ratepayer.

I trust this letter is helpful in preparing for the EFDC meeting which will incorporate the Greensted Ward agenda item.

Please let me know whether you require any further information.

Yours sincerely

Mark Squire
Town Clerk