

Report to the Electoral and Community Governance Review Committee

Date of Meeting: 1 March 2011

Item:

Subject: Community Governance Review - Moreton, Bobbingworth and The Lavers Parish Council

Officer Contract for Further Information: I Willett (01992 564243)

Committee Secretary: P Sewell (01992 564532)

Recommendations:

- (1) To consider the proposed boundary revision at Matching Green as agreed at the December 2010 site meeting;**
- (2) To note the position regarding changes to the Parliamentary Constituency boundary at Matching Green in the light of advice from the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC);**
- (3) To consider, subject to consultation, the principle of asking LGBC to make an order for aligning the District and County electoral boundaries at Matching Green to a new Parish boundary, taking account of:**
 - (a) cost implications of additional elections;**
 - (b) the need to avoid voter uncertainty if boundaries are configured differently;**
- (4) To consider, subject to consultation, whether an additional Parish election should be held in 2012 in Matching Parish taking account of any views of that Council about cost;**
- (5) To consider, subject to consultation, where the “out of sequence” District Ward election should be held taking account of:**
 - (i) LGBC’s view on the electoral cycle;**
 - (ii) cost;**
 - (iii) the importance of synchronising this with any additional parish elections in Matching; and**
- (6) To incorporate these issues in the proposed consultation material.**

Report

1. At the last meeting, the Committee considered the results of the first round of consultation on the re-warding of MBL Parish by combining the three Lavers wards into a single ward entitled “The Lavers”.
2. The Committee made the following decisions:
 - (a) to proceed with the Lavers ward as a firm proposal;

- (b) to include the following in the second stage consultation:
 - (i) a parish boundary change in Matching Green village with the objective of including the whole village in Matching Parish;
 - (ii) the possibility of increasing the number of Parish Councillors in Matching Parish to reflect an increase in its electorate;
 - (iii) the possibility of reducing the number of Parish Councillors in MBL to reflect a reduction in its electorate;
 - (iv) approval of a revised timescale for completing the community governance review;
 - (v) including reference to the timing of Parish Council elections on the basis of a new parish boundary in the consultation;
 - (vi) including in the consultation consequential effects on District and County Council electoral wards/divisions.
- 3. In addition, the Committee called for further consultation with Matching and MBL Parish Councils on the new boundary in Matching Green, together with liaison with the Boundary and Local Government Boundary Commissions on the effect of the suggested Parish boundary change on the same Parliamentary, County Council Division and District Ward boundaries.

New Matching Green Parish Boundary

- 4. A site meeting was held on 9 December 2010 at Matching Green. This was attended by the Parish Clerks from MBL and Matching, Parish Councillors from each Council, the District Ward Councillors for Moreton & Fyfield and for Hastingwood, Matching and Sheering Village. The existing boundary was walked and agreement reached on how it might be altered to include the whole village in Matching Parish.
- 5. A map showing this boundary will be shown at the meeting.

Liaison with the Parliamentary and Local Government Boundary Commissions regarding the Other Common Electoral Boundaries

- 6. The Parliamentary Constituency Boundary (Harlow/Brentwood and Ongar) is dealt with by the Parliamentary Boundary Commission. A letter was sent to that Commission seeking informal views about its likely attitude to a Parish boundary change at Matching Green. No reply has been received to date. This is not altogether surprising in that a national review of constituencies has suffered a protracted period of debate in Parliament.
- 7. A reply was, however, received from the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) (see Appendix 1). The most important advice in that letter is:
 - (a) the Commission is unlikely to have any difficulty with making an order to amend the District and County electoral boundaries if this Council decides to make its own order to change the Parish boundary;
 - (b) the Commission will stipulate in its order that an additional election would be required at District level to reinstate the normal electoral cycle;

(c) the Commission will ask which of the District Wards should have an “out of turn” election;

(d) the Commission recommends that Essex County Council should be consulted about (c) above.

8. The LGBC has also commented on the Parliamentary Constituency Boundary issue. It is clear that whatever changes are made to the other boundaries, the Parliamentary boundary will only change as part of the forthcoming review and not before.

Commentary on LGBC Advice – Parliamentary Constituencies

9. It now seems that the Parliamentary Constituency boundary will not change as a result of this review. The relevant Commission is, subject to the current legislation, due to report to Parliament on its review by October 2013. The intention is to have the new constituencies in place in time for the next General Election in 2015.
10. If a General Election were to be called before 2015, it seems certain that this would take place on the present boundaries. In Matching Green, if the other boundaries have been altered, such a General Election would mean that some Matching Green residents would still vote in the Harlow Constituency election. To avoid voter uncertainty, polling arrangements would need careful planning and publicity if this happens.
11. A summary of this advice should be included in the consultation material to be supplied as part of this review.

Commentary on LGBC Advice – County Divisions and District Wards

12. It now seems that these boundaries can (unlike the Parliamentary boundary) be changed by an order of the LGBC. The Commission appears to regard the transfer of electorate as not significant enough to trigger a wholesale review of the District and County arrangements in this District.
13. The complication is that the LGBC intends to make provision in that order for an “out of cycle” election for one of the two District Wards involved. Currently, elections are scheduled as follows:

Matching etc DW	2011
Matching Parish	2011
Moreton and Fyfield DW	2012
MBL Parish	2012
Essex CC	2013
North Weald and Nazeing CD	2014
Ongar and Rural CD	2014

14. It seems likely that the Parish boundary change could be implemented from 2012, the year of the MBL elections and one year after the Matching Parish elections this year.
15. LGBC is likely to adopt a similar approach to the District Ward elections for Matching and Moreton & Fyfield. There would clearly be an advantage in

synchronising the additional Parish and District Council elections to save costs. A possible scenario is as follows:

Matching PC /Matching etc DW	2011
Matching PC /Matching etc DW) MBL PC election/Moreton & Fyfield DW)	2012

16. An alternative is to not hold a Parish Council election in Matching until 2015 even if the boundary does change. This will save the Parish council costs but will mean that the Matching Green residents who transfer will not have say in their elected members until 2015.
17. This Council will be asked which of the two District Council wards should have the additional election.
18. This issue needs to be aired in the consultation material.

Consultation with Parish Councils

19. Copies of the proposed consultation material were sent for comment to MBL and Matching Parish Councils. Appendix 2 shows a response from MBL. To date comments have not been received from Matching PC.
20. The comments on the consultation material by MBL are dealt with in a separate report. Under this report, the Committee should consider:
 - (a) concerns expressed about the complexity of the consultation;and
 - (b) concerns about consulting individual electors rather than households in Matching Green (ie MBL part).
21. The number of electors in Matching Green is 164 in 99 households. Dealing with individual electors rather than households will increase costs but in the context of a wider consultation at stage 2 which will be more expensive anyway. For the 3 Lavers wards at Stage 1 the cost of a postal questionnaire was approximately £300 for 316 households. There are 273 households in Matching Parish.
21. The Committee should review its stage 2 consultation as indicated in the recommendations at the commencement of this report.

Ecclesiastical Boundaries

22. This issue was raised during the discussion on site at Matching Green. A map will be displayed showing this boundary but it is felt that this need not complicate the proposed Parish boundary change.