

## **POTENTIAL GROUPING Alconbury & Alconbury Weston Parish Council**

During recent training sessions, councillors have been made aware that a number of councils in Cambridgeshire have merged in recent years, finding that such arrangements could make efficiencies and save costs. As a result, Alconbury and Alconbury Weston councillors have been exploring whether there could be advantages in merging the 2 councils into one. Such a move would not necessarily involve each village losing its identity and they might be able to retain separately ring-fenced budgets. Each council often deals with similar issues and both villages share most of their public facilities. Each council has also experienced difficulty in recruiting sufficient councillors from time to time. Huntingdon District Council (HDC) was therefore requested to undertake a governance review in order to make recommendations on how such a merger could be put in place. The recommendations could be considered by each village council; either would be able to pull out were the proposals thought to be unsuitable.

From HDC's timetable below, you will see that they are currently seeking comments on the Terms of Reference for a review. They are scheduled to circulate recommendations on 22 Sep and our understanding is that we then have until 7 Dec, over 2 months, to consider whether to accept them. We believe that that is the time when we should have an informed debate on the subject, and we expect to circulate details of the proposals to facilitate this.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
Terms of Reference (TOR) are published.	30 March 2021
Introductory stage – submissions are invited.	30 March 2021
Last day for comments on Terms of Reference to be received.	30 June 2021 (originally 30 May 2021)
Consideration of submissions received – recommendations are prepared	July/August 2021
Initial recommendations are published concluding the review	22 September 2021
Final recommendations are published – concluding the review	7 December 2021
Council resolves to make a Reorganisation Order	15 December 2021
Order made	Thereafter

However, regarding comments so far given on Facebook and Nextdoor, AWPC would like to respond and confirm as follows:-

This is not a merging of the two villages but merely the potential grouping of Parish Councils (PC's). It has been published in minutes available on village notice boards, on the AWPC website and has been mentioned in the Parish Pump also from the end of last year.

There are procedures to be gone through in the right order, namely asking HDC for a governance review in the first instance to ascertain feasibility and viability. This is now in process (see table above).

A Poll will not be considered at this stage of the Governance Review because as yet there is nothing definite upon which to base a vote. This proposal is by no means a 'done deal', the number of Councillors per village is also, as yet, not determined, PC Budgets and where held will also be under discussion.

There was also a request (via facebook) for pro's & con's of the potential grouping. Although HDC are not requesting this yet, merely asking about agreement to the terms of reference. Our thoughts are therefore as follows:

### **PRO's**

- \* The voice of two small villages grouped together would give a bigger voice over issues of the shared public amenities, promoting a joint coordinated influence in how they serve us.eg Memorial Hall, school, shop, and ASSC etc.
- \* Common interests also include promoting maintenance to roads and footpaths (including the link between the two villages) and in traffic management (eg addressing speeding).
- \* Most of the clubs are run by residents from both villages
- \* Flooding affects both villages and its alleviation will be coordinated jointly.
- \* Having one larger PC will give us more say over general issues around the area, especially as there is likely to be a large future influence from Alconbury Weald. Includes as yet or potential unforeseen issues eg Luton Airport potential re-stacking of flights over this area.
- \* The cost of the Parish Clerk would be shared ie saving costs.
- \* The grouped PC would allow more Councillors in total, thus division of responsibilities to be more equitably decided allowing for all views to be considered and formation of working groups instead of individuals.
- \* Economy of effort means both PC's will not be discussing the same issues in isolation twice but once with more shared opinions. We have same issues to discuss. If the minutes of each PC is compared, both are discussing exactly the same topics.
- \* Grouping of PC's has been undertaken successfully in other areas around Cambridgeshire.
- \* The prospect of better collaboration on a neighbourhood plan to protect both villages against over-development.

### **CON's -**

- \* Potential for AW to lose it's autonomy(see comment on facebook).
- \* Depending on numbers of Councillors for AW, no matter how hard they try, AW could be outvoted purely on numbers (see comment on facebook),  
AWPC - should the right safeguards not be put in place.
- \* Council meetings may be longer with the potential to skip over the smaller issues.