

DORSET COUNCIL COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2021- A submission from Bradpole Parish Council

INTRODUCTION

The character of Bradpole Civil Parish (CP) is one of a rural/urban mix stretching from the River Brit in the west to the A35 in the east. It comprises landmark features including the River Asker, which provides a “Green lung” through residential areas, and Watton Hill crossed by the long distance [“Monarchs Way”](#) footpath.

The Parish has shared boundaries with Allington, Bothenhampton and Walditch, Loders and Netherbury Parishes as well as with Bridport Town.

For some weeks Bradpole Parish Council (BPC) has been in liaison with the aforementioned parishes regarding minor boundary anomalies which will be referred to later in this document.

A preliminary meeting with Bridport Town Council (BTC), requested by the leader of the Council “to discuss areas of common interest”, was held in July.

At the outset of this discussion we were told that BTC had prepared no plans for consideration, we suggested a follow up meeting once they had some plans.

Without further discussion BTC subsequently published, at a hybrid meeting (21st Sept 2021), a [Draft submission](#) in which the preferred option was to take over the Parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch and Bradpole leading to a reduction in parishioners’ representation by Councillors.

At the 21/09 meeting it was acknowledged that the preferred option would lead to a consequential increase in precepts, equivalent at BAND D by c.£104 p.a., as calculated by BTC, in “the parishes that we are going to take over”. An increase described as “small” by at least one Bridport Councillor.

This unilateral action overshadowed any considerations relating to minor changes which BPC might otherwise have agreed with other local parishes.

We do not consider that this approach is within the spirit of a CGR. Nor, from what we have heard, would it be welcome by many affected residents.

Bradpole Parish Councillors and staff have since focussed their resources on submitting this response in line with Dorset Council’s recommendation to parishes.

PREVIOUS REVIEWS

A Bradpole Parish electoral boundary review was [last carried out in 2002](#) (prior to the [2007 Act](#)) when the existing boundaries were confirmed: 2 x wards, Bradpole Village & Claremont, of nine Councillors and one councillor respectively.

This review left some minor anomalies such as at Watton Gardens, the Pymore settlement split between Allington CP & Bradpole CP, and a unit at St Andrews Industrial Estate having a boundary through the building. It is also noted that the character and location of Claremont Ward is more associated with Bridport Town. The Pymore settlement, which is largely split by the river Brit “landform”, has historical and geographical connections to Bradpole village* and could be better served, subject to the consent of the residents, by being one entire settlement within Bradpole Parish thus creating a “sense of place” which would be sustainable. However whilst Allington Parish remains as a viable entity and the residents are content the boundary may be better left as it is. (ref: APPENDIX 1, MAP5)

*See [The Heritage of Bradpole & Pymore](#).

There is an area to the south of the Bradpole Civil Parish boundary, east and west of the A3066, where many residents relate more to Bradpole Parish than Bridport Town. This area currently sits within the Bridport boundary owing to a historical boundary change to incorporate the site of the railway station into Bridport at the time. The railway closed in the 1970's but the anomalies remain.

There has been no significant development within the parish boundaries since the 2002 boundary review that would warrant a major restructure of those boundaries or, indeed the number of Councillors.

The proposals set out in Appendix 1 to this submission seek to address some of the above anomalies whilst respecting the adopted 2020 Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan (BANP).

LAND ASSETS & MANAGEMENT

Bradpole Parish Council owns [several land parcels](#). All of these have been registered at the HM Land Registry in recent years with much of the work having been undertaken by experienced Parish Councillors thus reducing the cost to our residents. Subsequent to this the Parish Council entered into Deeds of Dedication with [Fields in Trust](#) to protect two of the larger land parcels in perpetuity. Again much of this was undertaken by our Councillors, working with the Parish Clerk, to minimise the cost to our residents.

The total cost of our green spaces management, running into several thousands of pounds each year, is borne by the residents of Bradpole CP with the assets being available for use by everyone near and far.

Apart from the above mentioned management BPC contributes a substantial annual sum towards the maintenance of the parish cemetery at Holy Trinity Church, Bradpole.



New signage at the “protected” Gore Cross Recreation Area

A COHESIVE CIVIL PARISH COMMUNITY



A Parish Notice Board at Railway Gardens, Bradpole.

An important feature in the Bradpole Community is the [Bradpole Forster Village Hall](#). This was established in the late 19th century, about the time the Parish Council came into being, being funded by public subscription in memory of [Rt Hon W.E. Forster](#) an important “son” of Bradpole.

The Village Hall is owned and managed by a charitable trust separate from the Parish Council. In recent years it had become increasingly clear that the then trustees were unable to continue with their responsibilities and in early 2020 Bradpole Parish Councillors, together with the Parish Clerk, stepped in to “save” the Village Hall for the community as the Charity Commission had stated that it should be closed down.

Bradpole Parish Council has led the way locally in recent years with a comprehensive [website](#) now comprising some 40 pages which not only provides transparent and mandatory information but also much more about the cohesive Bradpole Parish Community including a weekly report to Councillors. In addition to this Councillors, and our part-time Officers, also manage Bradpole’s social media which provides current news and links, sometimes reaching more than 3x the population of the Civil Parish.

Councillors are aware that not everyone, in an elderly population, has access to the internet so we also produce a [quarterly newsletter](#) of current news which is posted on the Parish Notice Boards by Councillors and Officers with hard copies available at the Village Hall.

Realising the importance of communication Parish notice boards - some being shared with local community groups, have been replaced and increased in recent years, partly funded by S106 receipts. We have used all of these facilities to “talk to our parish” as recommended by Dorset Council in February 2021. See APPENDIX 2.

Bradpole Councillors agreed a contribution towards the wider Community arrangements re COVID.

With a degree of serendipity COVID-19 intervened shortly after we had received the Charity Commission instructions to close the Hall. This provided a window of opportunity during which the Parish Council ensured the fabric of the building was protected whilst launching a campaign to attract a new Board of Trustees. Fortunately this was supported by the community. There is now a new and capable Board of Trustees in place and the Hall has recently re-opened following the relaxation of COVID restrictions. The Parish Council provides financial support for this important community asset in the form of an office tenancy agreement.

We have already referred to the several Green Spaces that are owned by the Parish Council and we are fortunate to have an enthusiastic team of volunteers who formed a few years ago to introduce colourful bee-friendly native wildflowers in appropriate places around the Parish.

This biodiversity initiative has been welcomed by residents and has received positive praise in the local media.

We have been able to install a security shed, partly from some rarely received S106 developer contributions, to act as a base for volunteer groups.



More recently, and in a matched funding arrangement with the Bradpole Fete Committee, a defibrillator has been installed at the Village Hall. The Parish Council is currently arranging training for members of the local community.

← Here representatives of the Bradpole Fete Committee and the Parish Council unveil the new defibrillator.

We have re-opened a fortnightly Parish surgery at the Village Hall, another “hands on” approach, which, again, had been affected by COVID-19.

At the time of this submission a finger post refurbishment programme is nearing completion funded largely by the Parish Council but also with the help of some grant money that has been sourced and agreed.

The work is being carried out by local volunteers and has been widely welcomed by parishioners.

In 2017 a well-received Community Picnic was facilitated by Councillors and the Parish Clerk. It had been hoped to repeat this in 2020 ~ 21 but COVID-19 intervened.

Councillors are now in liaison with the Bradpole Fete Committee to host a Parish community event in June 2022 to align with the Queen’s Jubilee.

BUDGET & CONTRACTS

The Green infrastructure in the Civil Parish is managed by the Council entering into a variety of contracts/agreements, including with Bridport Town Council.

Bradpole Councillors also work closely with Dorset Council on footways management and flood alleviation measures across the parish.

A number of private contractors carry out a range of other maintenance duties. The total cost of this accounts for close to 50% of the Parish Council’s annual budget, reflected in the Parish Precept, all of which is transparently explained for residents and the public in general on the parish website [financial pages](#).

As mentioned above the Parish Council has a tenancy agreement with the Trustees of Bradpole Village Hall.

Bradpole Councillors are conscious of residents’ personal finances and well-being, not least of all in the current and uncertain national financial climate.

Within the annual budget process Councillors and the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) seek to achieve a balance whereby services and projects can be provided and enhanced whilst the Parish precept remains affordable. As an example if the Bradpole household precept were to be increased to 1/3rd of that of neighbouring Bridport Town it would double the amount of money that would be available to be spent in the parish each year providing the capacity to achieve much more.

However this would require that the Parish element of the precept be increased by 100%, we do not consider this to be either fair or sustainable for our residents.

COUNCILLORS

Parish Councils generally have often found it difficult to attract people to stand at Elections and in some cases residents choose to represent, not their community, but adjacent ones for whatever personal reasons.

At the 2019 election just 5 Councillors stood, partly as the result of some then recent deaths of Councillors.

All 5 candidates were accepted by the Returning Officer in 2019 and were elected Councillors having received the paperwork to confirm that.

In seeking members Bradpole Parish Council has always widely advertised elections in accordance with protocols, having earmarked funds to cover election costs. With a shortfall in numbers we have maintained co-option publicity and now have 9 Councillors with new members having been co-opted by way of a process that includes a “Person Specification” as recommended by NALC.

This has resulted in Bradpole Parish Council having a competent team of Councillors who bring a range of skills to the “table”.

Each Councillor has a specific geographical area of responsibility within the Civil Parish which ensures that we can continue to provide a close, pro-active and “hands on” approach with actions and decisions importantly being made at Parish level and at the earliest opportunity, LOCALISM in action.

Importantly Bradpole’s Councillors will contribute to an Emergency Resilience Plan which is currently being negotiated with parish-based organisations.

It should be remembered that none of Bradpole’s Councillors receive any allowances for the time they give to their community.

This all helps to keep the Bradpole parish element of the Council Tax to affordable levels whilst not lacking the capacity to get things done.

Unlike some larger councils BPC has no allegiance to any Political Party and has always been informed by the wishes of residents, expressed in parish consultations.

STAFF

Workload increases, related to a variety of factors, were a discussion point when our Parish Clerk’s annual appraisals were undertaken in recent years.

Together with the Clerk’s personal wish to marginally reduce her hours Councillors agreed to contract a Deputy Clerk who has now been in place since Feb. 2021.

The total number of hours contracted between both Clerks now amount to 17 hours per week and they are well placed to handle parish and devolved matters.

BPC is fortunate to have them on the team to keep Councillors fully informed and advised and to provide a continuity of service to the community.

BRIDPORT AREA NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN (BANP)

Bradpole Parish Council was somewhat coerced into being a participant in the [Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan](#) (BANP) following “behind closed doors” discussions, not involving the Parish Council at the time, but BPC stuck with it, not always with the full support of residents, contributing toward both operational costs and to some projects that benefit the wider area. We also have a policy in place which enables Councillors to consider contributions from the CIL uplift (15% ~ 25% by virtue of being a participant in a “Made” Plan) as and when such funds are (rarely) received from developers levies.

BANP was adopted in May 2020 following a positive Referendum in February of that year. Policies offer the “protection”, promoted by the Parish Council, to certain Green Spaces & Gaps within the parish, this being of the highest priority to parishioners as indicated in various Parish consultations.

A [2016 Environment & Heritage Report](#), written and approved by Parish Councillors, contributed much to the Landscape policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

Prior to the 2020 Referendum all participating councils had “signed off” the Neighbourhood Plan, together with agreed Governance arrangements.

These arrangements ensured that the agreement of each participating Council was required in managing all aspects of the Plan, particularly in financial matters.

Importantly the Plan seeks to preserve the identity and character of the participating parishes as voted for by electors.

With a close knowledge of their parish Bradpole’s Councillors are able to provide Dorset Council with expedient and detailed responses to planning applications received for consultation including by reference to National and Local planning policies including those in the Neighbourhood Plan.

CONCLUSION

There are 9000 + parish councils across the country providing “ Localism” by facilitating the devolution of decision-making powers from central government control to local individuals and communities.

There is a misconception amongst some larger councils that Parish Councils can achieve little and do not have sufficient capacity to undertake their responsibilities.

At Bradpole Parish Council we find these broad generalisations to be disrespectful to Councillors, who offer their time freely, but also to staff and residents. The Bridport Local Area Partnership wrote to Dorset Council this month saying there is “a sense that Parish Councils are not always respected as a statutory part of local government with a strong role to play in local democracy and service provision.” This lack of respect is something we have been witness to in this Review process.

A recent [DEMOCRATIC REPAIR](#) publication refers to The Power Of Place indicating that people respond more positively to leaders whom they perceive as rooted in their communities, with life experiences relevant to those communities.

We are confident that the information provided herein will inform readers of this submission that the community-based team at Bradpole Parish Council is more than capable in managing their responsibilities whilst demonstrating a pro-active and local “hands on” approach to getting things done that ensures the identities and interests of community governance is both effective and convenient.

Bradpole Parish Council provides hereunder reasoned proposals which seek to:

- eliminate minor anomalies,
- consider the warding outcome of the 2002 Boundary Review,
- take account of the requests from outlying parishes, and
- generally ensure the viability of a continued presence of local representatives in the form of Bradpole Parish Council rather than the reduction/abolition of such as proposed in some submissions.

Bradpole Councillors encourage and respect the Rights of residents to express their personal views.

These have been taken into account in completing this paper as it is residents who inform Councillors of their wishes and not vice versa.

We have considered the relative costs of proposals since the larger and more controversial proposals are, the more they would cost the public purse to implement.

NOTE 1: Councillors and residents did express concerns relating to an error in the online form where, for those who wished to respond “No Change”, there was no place to identify to which parish responses referred to.

In a reply from Legal & Democratic Services dated 18th October this error in the survey was acknowledged and we were informed that measures had been put in place to ensure that all responses are recorded accurately. We believe this to be of great importance if Review outcomes are to be considered robust.

NOTE 2: In responding to a question regarding Parish Precepts Dorset Council’s Democratic & Electoral Services indicated that Dorset Council cannot take into account the effect on local residents of moving from a lower to a higher precept council. However they acknowledged that the consequence of such might have financial impacts on particular residents. We do believe it is necessary for Bradpole Councillors to have regard to the financial consequences of any proposal upon our parishioners, not least of all for those who live in an area of the parish with one of the highest levels of deprivation in Dorset.

In making this submission Bradpole Councillors have taken into account the Electorate Data and Projected 5 Year Forecast provided:

Polling District	Parish	Parish Ward	No. of Councillors	Electorate 2021	Projected Electorate 2026	Electors per Councillor 2026
BRD4	Bradpole	Bradpole Village	9	1692	1634	182
BRD5	Bradpole	Claremont	1	244	235	235

The above figures show a modest 3.4% reduction in projected (electoral) population over a five year period. This represents no significant change since the area within the development boundary is fully built and the remainder of land within the parish is “Greenfield” swept over by the Dorset AONB.

Section 154 of the [2010 Guidance Document](#) indicates that a typical parish council representing between 501 and 2500 people had six to twelve Councillors.

Whilst there is no firm guidance, to an extent the number of Councillors required would be determined by the proactivity of the Parish Council.

In the case of Bradpole, which is a proactive Council, there are currently 10 seats across the two existing wards with a total population of some 2300 people (2011 Census) providing an average of 230 people per Councillor which seems to be a good representative average.

PROPOSAL

This proposal effectively moves the current Ward of Claremont, including St Catherine’s School, to within Bridport Town Boundaries. This being offset in household numbers by the addition of the area east and west of the A3066 north of St Katherine’s Drive to Bradpole Parish.

The opportunity is also taken here to regularise anomalies surrounding a small number of properties at Watton Gardens and that at St Andrews Industrial Estate. The proposed boundary changes do provide for a greater level of cohesion, and more effective and convenient local government for those affected.

These proposed boundary changes are shown on **MAPs 1 & 2** hereunder.

This proposal also addresses a minor (land only) boundary adjustment, with no electoral consequences, along the Mangerton River requested by neighbouring Lodders PC shown on **MAP 3**.

There is a clear and sustainable boundary (A35) between Bradpole CP and Bothenhampton & Walditch CP that requires no amendment.

NOTE: BPC had been liaising with Netherbury Parish Council regarding a small number of Netherbury Parish households on the boundary between the two parishes which may be better served by being within Bradpole Parish boundaries. However Netherbury PC wrote on 06/10/21: *“Given the proposals from Bridport Town Council and the uncertainty that this brings, particularly around the precept they have held off contacting the residents.”*

This amendment is not therefore being pursued at this time but subject to outcomes it may remain relevant.

MAP 4 is a proposed whole parish map in accordance with the above but not including a possible adjustment at Pymore (see below & **MAP 5**)

THE EFFECT OF THESE BOUNDARY CHANGES UPON (a) THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS & (b) COSTS of IMPLEMENTATION:

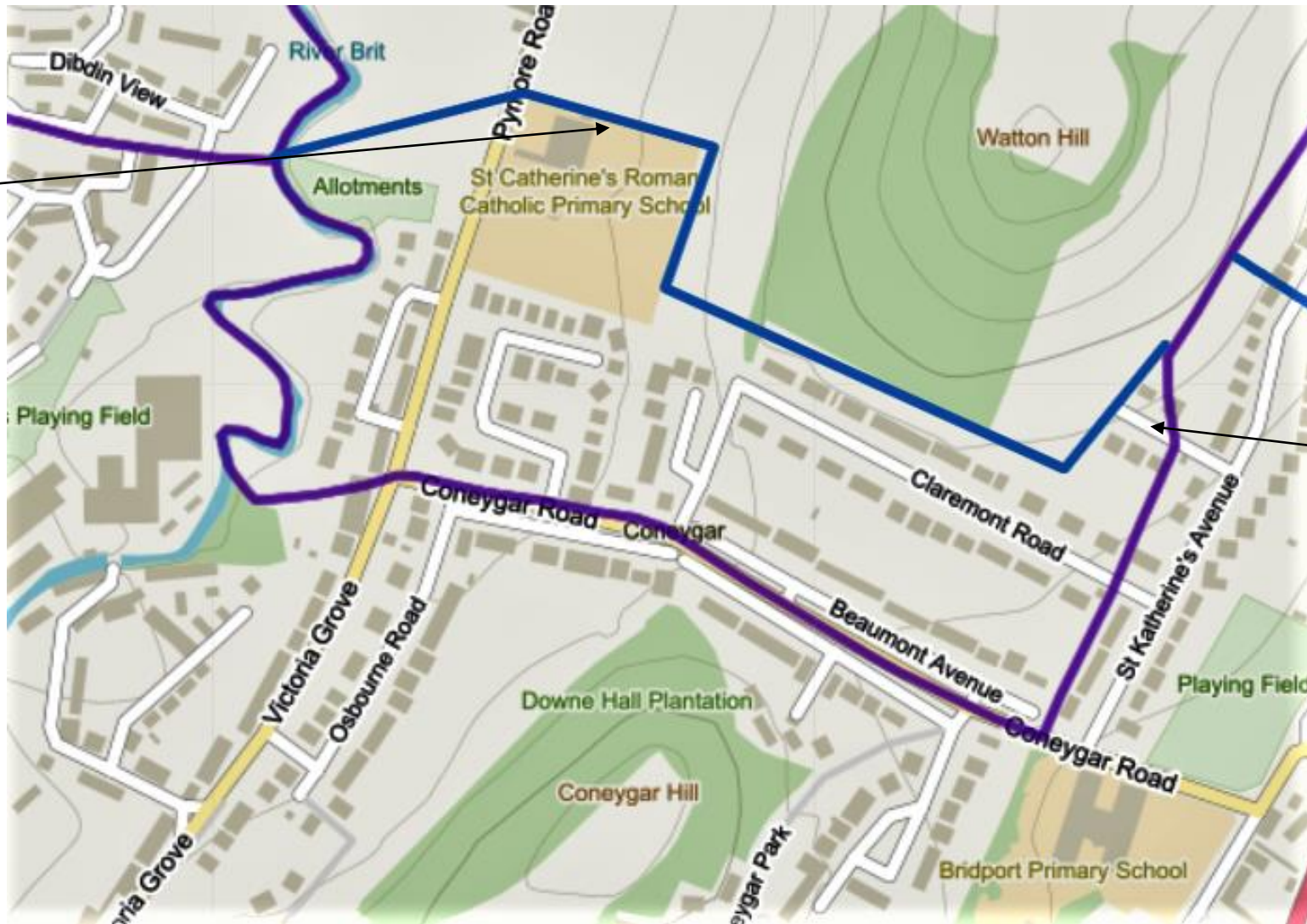
a) Largely balanced in numbers although some households moving to within Bridport Town boundaries can expect a rise at Band D calculated at current levels, by Bridport Town Council, at £104 p.a. (from £44 p.a. to c.£148 p.a. a rise of some 238%). Similarly those households moving to within Bradpole Parish boundaries can expect a significant reduction in their Council taxes at current levels.

b) The implementation cost to the parish and the local authority will be relatively low, with little effect on existing contracts and no asset transfer costs.

NOTE: In the [online mapping site](#) provided for CGR the **PURPLE LINE** = EXISTING BOUNDARIES / **BLUE LINE** = PROPOSED BOUNDARIES

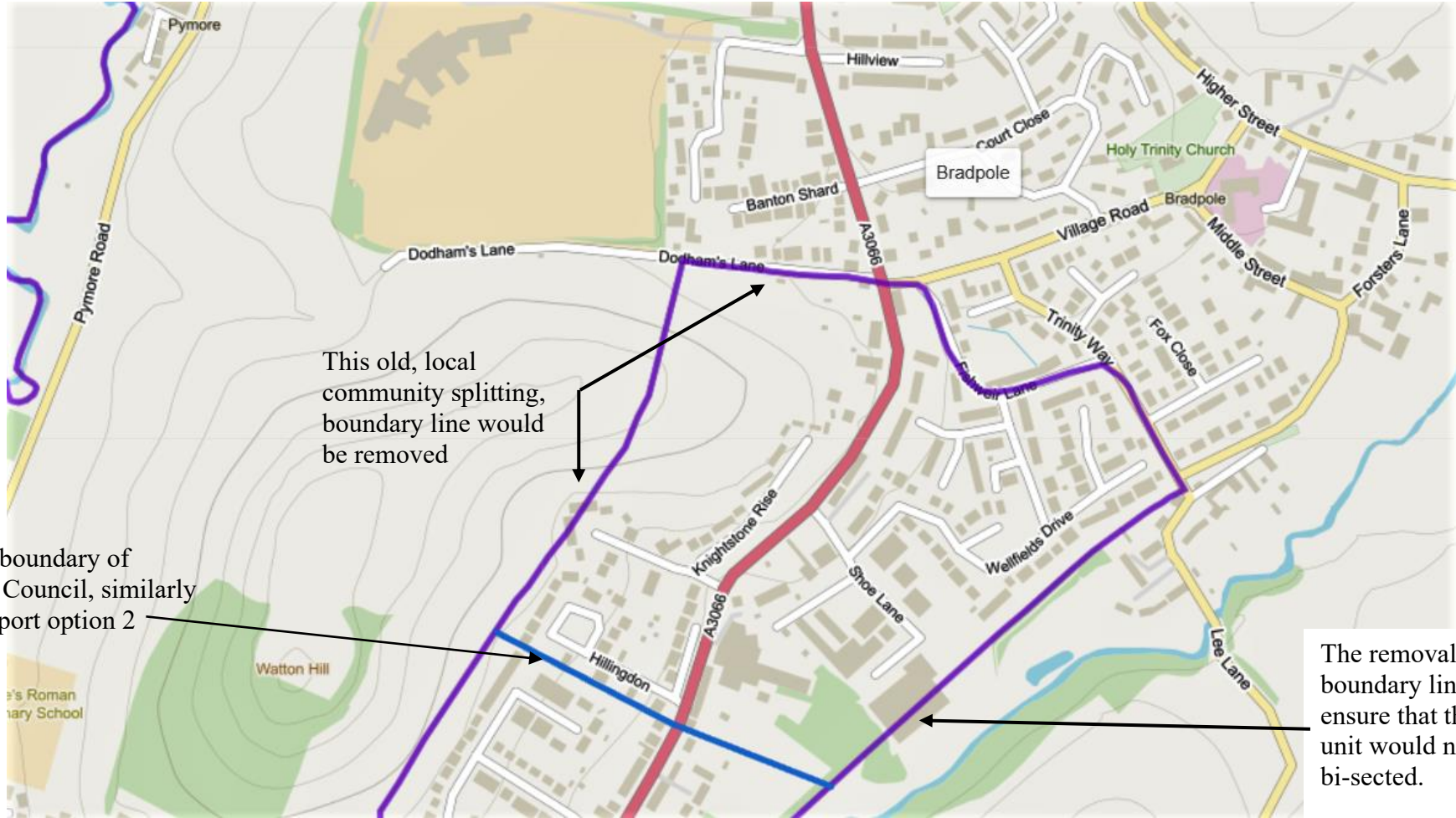
MAP 1) CLAREMONT WARD & WATTON GARDENS

New Boundary line in blue



The Watton Gardens anomaly would be sorted.

MAP 2) HILLINGDON, KNIGHTSTONE & WELLFIELDS DRIVE AREAS (East & West of A3066)



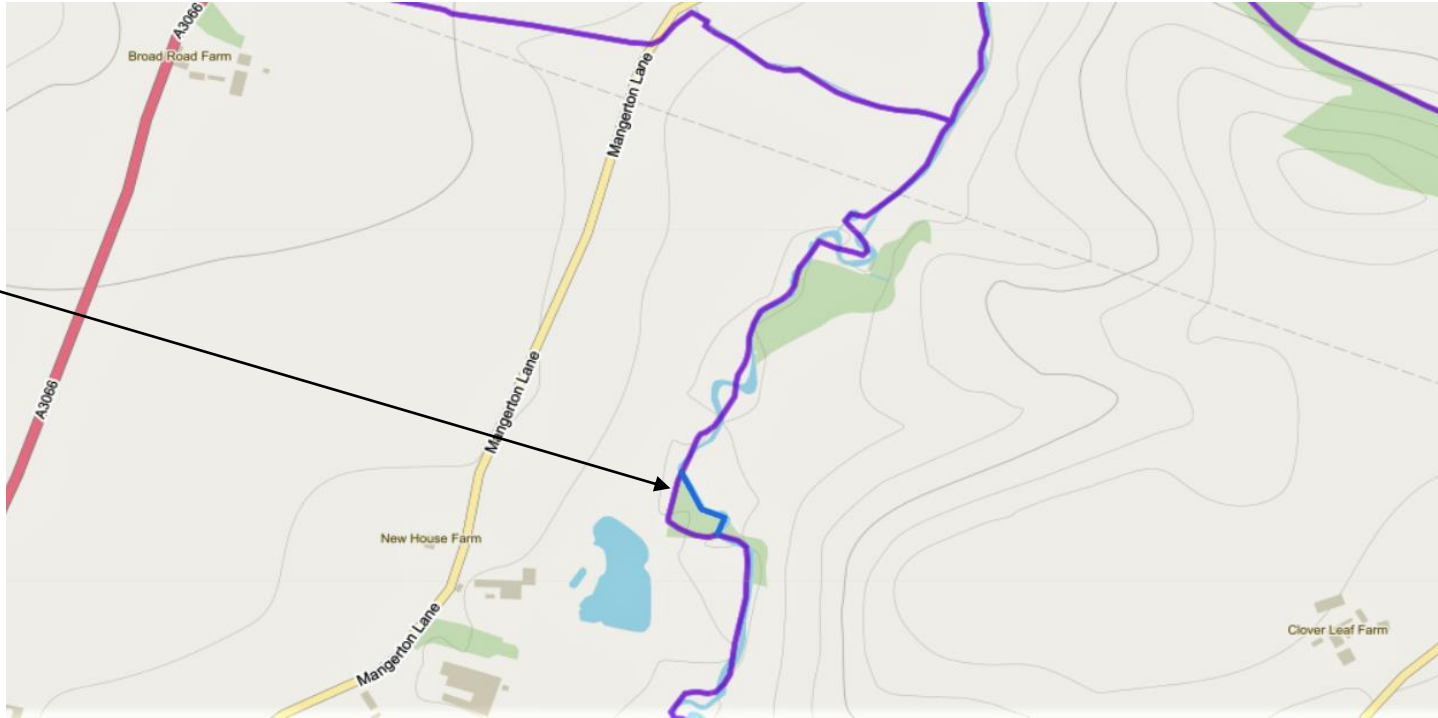
This old, local community splitting, boundary line would be removed

New Northern boundary of Bridport Town Council, similarly placed to Bridport option 2

The removal of this boundary line would ensure that this Industrial unit would no longer be bi-sected.

MAP 3) LODERS PC / MANGERTON RIVER

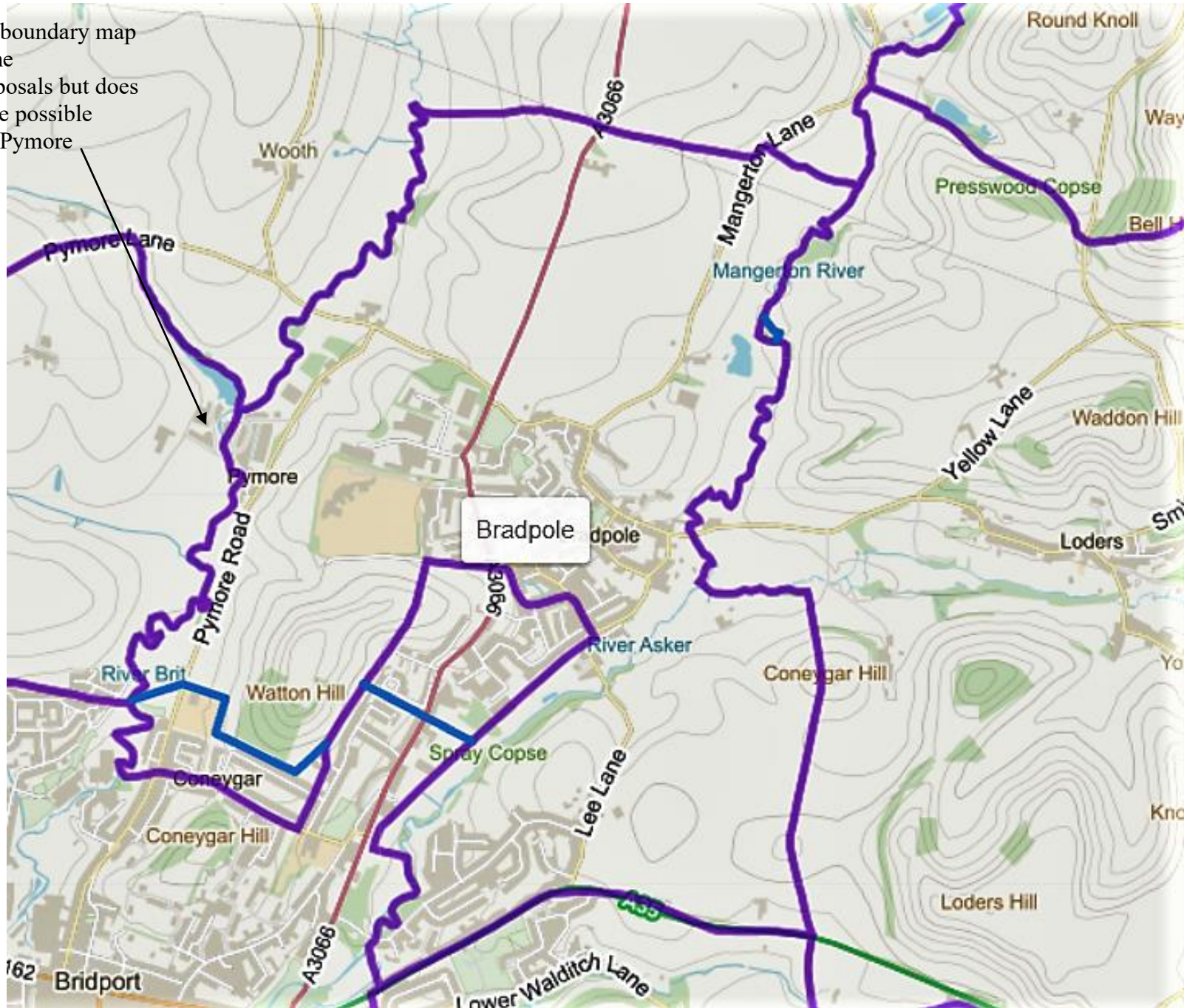
This small boundary adjustment, requested by Loders PC, has no electoral consequences but moving the boundary to the river allows the line of an adjacent ROW to exist in a single parish rather than being split as it currently is. See submission from Loders P.C.



MAP 4) PROPOSED WHOLE BRADPOLE PARISH BOUNDARY

This proposed new boundary map takes into account the aforementioned proposals but does not allow for a future possible boundary change at Pymore

(see MAP 5 below).



PYMORE SETTLEMENT (additional option)

We have suggested earlier in this paper that there MAY be an opportunity to join the East and West parts of the Pymore settlement to create a real “sense of place”. Given the geographical and historical connections to Bradpole the boundary could be amended to incorporate the settlement within Bradpole parish. However, whilst Allington Parish remains as a viable entity the boundary may be better left as it is and residents may prefer the status quo.

In a proposal from Bridport Town Council, regardless of the fact that neither part of Pymore is within the town boundary, it has been suggested that households in Pymore should fall within the distant Symondsburry Parish.

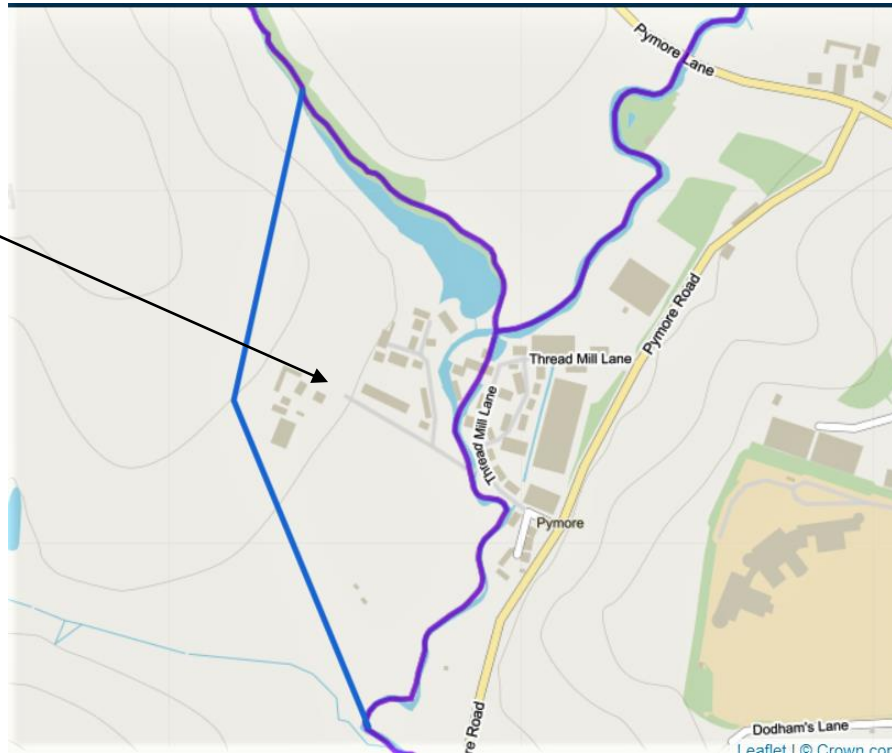
We are not aware that BTC, or indeed Symondsburry Parish Council, has sought the views of residents in Pymore.

Given the sensitivities around this issue, and respecting the rights of those people potentially affected, Bradpole PC, in agreement with Allington PC, has invited all Pymore residents to express their views and has encouraged them to respond direct to Dorset Council.

MAP 5 allows for a possible boundary adjustment.

MAP 5) PYMORE SETTLEMENT

This boundary adjustment would only apply if certain conditions, as described in this paper, were to occur.



“TALKING” TO BRADPOLE PARISH

In February 2021 Dorset Council suggested that: “parish councils start talking with their parish at an early stage”

We have been addressing this through our website and social media platforms, quarterly newsletters, on street chats, Emails, and by a household mail drop undertaken by our Councillors.

We would have held an open meeting, COVID-safety precautions have rather excluded that possibility.

Whilst we may have expected those households closer to the “heart” of Bradpole to be supportive of their Parish Council - which they are - we were pleasantly surprised to receive a number of positive comments about the Parish Council from households much closer to, in particular, the Bridport Town boundary to the south of the parish.

From various comments received we conclude that the direct contact residents can have with both parish Councillors and staff is greatly appreciated, even “localism” has been mentioned, and there is a feeling that there is no need to change that which is working well for the community.

The fact that the Parish Council is run by local people, who receive no pay and have the interests of villagers and the local environment at heart, carries much weight.

A smaller number of residents commented that they could understand the desire of Bridport Town Council to achieve a single council unit for the area but felt that town Councillors would have to cover a wider area, may not live locally and would have to balance competing needs.

In all cases, whether supportive or not, Bradpole Parish Council has promoted the need for residents to express THEIR views to direct to Dorset Council by the various means available to them.

