

Blandford St Mary Parish Council Response for Boundary Changes**26th October 2021**

Following the publication of the terms of reference for the Community Governance Review, Blandford St Mary Parish Council would like to put forward their response.

Blandford St Mary Parish Council have used the guides from the Government Boundary Commission for England and have identified the interests of the community - community cohesion, bringing about improved community engagement, better local democracy and demonstrate a strong and exclusive community and voluntary sector. A sense pride, the sense of place.

Concerned that Blandford Forum Town Council has responded without consulting with any of the relevant parishes, though we appreciate there was no obligation for them to do so, but good governance would suggest they should have done. Blandford St Mary Parish Council received notification from Blandford Forum Town Council of their proposal, only giving four days to consult and formulate our response.

Dorset Council should not take the absence of a lengthy response of any indication of our agreement to any point that we have not challenged. We expect your consideration and weight to be given to our views not withstanding the fact that we had not the sufficient time to produce the response we would have wished.

Blandford St Mary is a friendly and well thought of Village. There is a great feel of community cohesion, as they come together for fund raising activities, volunteering for litter picks, and delivering the local magazine, to ensure those without the use of social media are kept up to date with the goings on around the village. The Village has its own pre-school and primary school, which the Parish Council are closely involved with. There are two large stores in the village, one Tesco's, including a petrol station and the other Homebase, so the community are able to use these services rather than relying on Blandford Form Town (these also offer free parking, where areas in Blandford Form Town charge for parking) The community also have access to the Hall and Woodhouse brewery site, offering a public bar, serving food and a shop. The Parish Council have also secured a 106 agreement for the use of their hall for meetings, which is free of charge for 30+ years, so if the community or local groups need to meet, they can also use the hall free of charge.

The community got heavily involved with the play area in Chettell Way, as the land was gifted to the village many years ago, so the community got together and raised funds to put a play area on the land for the children of the village, for all ages. The Parish Council took over the responsibility of maintaining the play area, multi ball court and recreation area to ensure it will be available for future residents. The community also got involved with the allotment project. The Parish Council were given a small area of very overgrown land, and residents had asked for allotments for the village, so under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, ss23(2), the Parish Council provided the site for 37 allotments. The Parish Council used community benefit funds that are secured for the Parish Council from the local Solar Panel project on an annual basis for the next 18 years, to get the land suitable for allotments for the village. If the village is moved into Blandford Forum Parish, this community benefit could be lost, taking away the guaranteed benefit for the community.

Even though Blandford St Mary is increasing in size, it still has its village feel, which give the community a sense of pride. The Parish Council have secured freehold land and a significant 106 financial contribution from a large development withing the village, to provide a Community Hall for the resident to use. The full planning application for the Community Hall is currently with Dorset Council for their approval. The community will be invited to be a part of the decision making of the internal design and the management of the hall, to ensure all profits will be put back into the

community. Funds to build and the hall will come from agreed 106 funds, grants and also by using the solar panel community benefit fund we can comfortably secure a loan if required. The Parish Council will be seeking grant funding for the Community Hall and the uncertainty regarding the Parish Council's future could put the entire project at risk.

The Parish Council employ the Clerk who has been with the Parish Council for 14 years and have local contractors for cutting the grass and for maintaining the play areas. If the village is moved into Blandford Parish, this will take away these jobs/livelihoods for these people.

The Parish Council's Clerk is a fully qualified Clerk and with most of the Councillors elected, the Parish Council have the general power of competence, so the community can be assured that they have a strong leadership and engagement with the community at an important level.

The Parish Council hold meetings at least ten times a year, where members of the community attend and have their suggestions listened to, to promote better local democracy. The Parish Council also have their website updated on a regular basis and also the Clerk's officer is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 4pm to improve the community engagement. Please note that Blandford Forum Town Council only have their offices open from 9.30am to 12.30pm Monday to Friday, which restricts the times for anyone to contact them. The community feel very comfortable in approaching our Councillors, as they are live in the village and are a big part of the community themselves.

The officers of the Parish Council have different roles:

- Planning
- Play area/ Multi ball court/ recreation ground
- Environment
- Blandford + monitoring group
- Allotments
- DAPTC
- A350 group
- Website

Details of the officers for the roles are available for the community on the Parish Council's website and notice boards.

The Parish Council have achieved a great deal for their 1233 residents in the past, which include the play area/multiball court, recreation area, allotments, supporting the pre-school and primary school, providing ground maintainance service to keep the village tidy, work with Sovereign Housing to ensure areas that are owned by them are managed correctly for the residents. Securing funds for community benefit from the solar panel project. Securing funds from developers for maintaining and new equipment for the play area and to supply a new Community Hall for the village.

Looking at the proposal from Blandford Forum Town Council

- Not all of the villages use the services in the Town as residents to shop in other towns and online. As stated above the village has access to large super stores and If residents from the village need to shop in the town, they pay for parking and also support the business in the town, which provided much need income to the business owners. As the village already have services that are easy to reach, there is no reason of why the current or proposed developments have placed additional burdens on Blandford Forum services. The majority of services in Blandford Forum are provided by Dorset County, or other agencies such as NHS.

A merger of parishes would do little to improve such but would provide significant financial gain to Blandford Forum Town Council. There has been no indication of what benefit the council taxpayers from Blandford St Mary would receive from this proposal in the expectation that they would be paying a considerable increase in local precept.

- The Parish Council also support the Town Council in grants for the use of the public toilets. The Parish Council have their own play area/ ball court and recreation area which we manage, which is very well used for the residents of the village. The Parish Council also own the said land that Blandford Forum Town Council asked for permission to use for the Skate Park, so they should manage that area, as this was not a project the Parish Council wished to take on at the time. The Parish Council supplied and installed outdoor gym equipment next to the Skate Park, which the Parish Council also manage and support BTC by paying them to do the monthly safety checks.

Blandford St Mary has a clear boundary definition due to the Stour River running between Blandford Forum and Blandford St Mary.

Blandford St Mary has its own strong local identity, with the locally famous Hall and Woodhouse Brewery and a handmade welcome to the village sign, designed by students from the primary school and some of the old buildings, the Stour Inn, and other adjoining historical buildings.

Also, to note It is not the case that local plan treat Blandford St Mary as a part of Blandford forum we are a tier four community and should not be treated as part of Blandford Forum

Conclusion: If Blandford St Mary is moved to Blandford Forum Parish, it would take its identity as a village away and it will take away the long-term sustainability and security for the village. The Parish Council are very confident that should we undertake a Public Referendum we would receive overwhelming support against Blandford Forum Town Council's proposal.

