



Community Governance Review – Q & A

Q. What is Bridport Town Council proposing?

A. The Town Council wants one council for Bridport, replacing four that currently cover the built-up area of the town. The main features are:

- A single town council area incorporating most of the existing parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bradpole and Bridport;
- A total of 20 councillors, compared with 44 at present across the four parishes;
- Wards and council committees within the new council area based on local identity, with five wards representing Bradpole, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bridport Central, Bridport West & Allington, and West Bay; and
- Inclusion of most of the Foundry Lea (Vearse Farm) development into the single council area.

Maps showing the existing and proposed parish boundaries are shown at the end of this document.

Q. Why does Bridport Town Council want to merge with the three adjacent parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole?

A. When the current arrangements were put in place, the town of Bridport was separated from the surrounding parishes by open space. In the years since, the town and the parishes have grown so that now it's just one built-up area. Having four different councils governing different parts of the town is inefficient and disjointed, and we think the whole town can achieve more if there's just one council. It'll also mean one voice for Bridport; a single group of elected representatives working together for the good of the whole town.

The current town and parish council structure was for a three-tier system of local government in Dorset, with Dorset County Council at the top, West Dorset District Council in the middle, and town and parish councils as the first tier. The abolition of West Dorset in 2019 means there's a huge gap between local communities and the unitary Dorset Council, and small councils have very little influence over them. We think it'd be better if we had one local council making the case for Bridport to Dorset Council.

The existing structure also means that people living in the current Bridport town area are paying for services enjoyed by everyone across the wider town area. We don't think this is fair – see question 4 for a more detailed explanation. At the same time, the people in the current parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole have no say in these services. This isn't fair either and our proposal would put it right.

Q. Why isn't Symondsbury included?

A. We think Symondsbury is different – it's mainly a rural parish and – unlike the other three parishes – has a clear green 'gap' between the main village settlement and the town.

However, we are proposing that some parts of the existing Symondsbury parish – the areas that are adjoined to the built-up area of Bridport – should move into Bridport parish. These are in West Cliff, Pine View, Magdalen Lane and most of the as yet unbuilt Foundry Lea development. Residents in these areas look to Bridport for their services and share a Bridport 'identity' that is less evident in the rural parts of Symondsbury.

Q. Will my Council Tax increase?

A. It's not possible to say at this stage, as the precept (the amount collected from Council Tax) would be set by the new council after it is formed – in May 2024. As with any other council, the new council would have the option of reducing, increasing or of not changing the level of precept levied on Council Tax payers.

What we do know is that the proposed new council will provide for a fairer system. Ever since the current town and parishes structure was created, only Bridport Parish taxpayers have been asked to pay for services that benefit all of us, like parks, nature reserves, highway verges, the Tourist Information Centre, the 'one-stop' council reception, Bridport's major events, and management of the town centre, including the brilliant Bridport Market. Residents of the three surrounding parishes benefit but don't pay, and they have no say in the running of these services. Our proposals would mean that everyone in Bridport would contribute, **and** be able to influence the services. Surely it's right that everyone in Bridport should both contribute, and have a say?

Q. Is it fair that some people might pay more?

A. We think so, if that's what the new council decides. Only Bridport Parish taxpayers pay for services that benefit all of us, and they are the only ones to have a say in their running. Just a few examples are:

- Most of the open green space in Bridport – like parks, gardens, sports pitches, nature reserves and highway verges, some of which are in the surrounding parishes.
- The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) and the 'one-stop' council reception at Mountfield, used by residents from across the area to get community information and support. The TIC is really important for our visitor economy, and acts as the Box Office for the town's main venues and events.
- Events that make Bridport 'Dorset's Eventful Town' and are a big part of what makes our town such a great place to live. This includes support for the Food, Beer, Hat, Folk and Jurassic Fields Festivals, Bridport Carnival, the Torchlight Procession, the Charter Fair, and Christmas Cheer.
- Funding support for town organisations – about £60,000 a year in support of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Leisure Centre, Arts Centre, Museum, West Bay Discovery Centre, Youth & Community Centre and tens of other community and voluntary organisations. Without them our town would be much the poorer.
- Bridport town centre. Maintenance of street furniture, Bucky Doo Square, Christmas lights, and Bridport's wonderful street market.
- Community facilities in West Bay – Harbour Green, Fisherman's Green, the Salt House, the new walking/cycle route on the old railway line, free public WiFi, and the brilliant fully accessible West Bay Play Area.
- Community facilities elsewhere in Bridport, like the Town Hall, WI Hall, and Bridport Cemetery, used by people from right across the Bridport area.

Not everyone uses these facilities, and it's possible not everyone wants them, but that is true of all public facilities. Those that do use them however come from right across Bridport including its parishes. Surely it's fair that everyone in Bridport gets to vote on whether to support them, and contributes a fair share for those they vote for?

Q. Will there be job losses?

A. Councillors will need to decide what the staffing needs are for the new Council, but no-one is suggesting that it should do less than the four parishes do at the moment. Indeed there are already many pressures to do more – see the later question about future changes – and we will need to service an expanded committee structure. Even with efficiency savings from a merger, we'll need the capacity to deliver, so it's by no means clear that jobs will be lost.

Q. Why do you want to change things right now?

A. The timing isn't our choice. Dorset Council should review parish governance arrangements every 10-15 years, but it hasn't happened here since 1986 – 35 years ago!

Q. Will I lose my local identity if I live in Allington, Bothenhampton, Bradpole, or Walditch?

A. No. People don't really base their idea of where they live on whether it has a parish council. West Bay is part of the parish of Bridport and already comes under Bridport Town Council. Ask residents there whether they don't feel like West Bay residents. What we do know is that the vast majority of people in the three parishes

think of themselves as being from Bridport, even if they also identify as being from a particular part of the town. The merger proposal won't change that.

Q. Will my local area lose out, with all of my Council Tax going into the town centre area?

A. No. The new council would have five local wards, each with separate committees with specific responsibility for protecting and improving their areas: Allington and West Bridport, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bradpole, Central Bridport, and West Bay. And don't forget, the councillors will be elected so will be directly accountable to you. At the moment, only residents in the centre of Bridport and in West Bay benefit from this level of democratic accountability.

For the things that the higher authorities control that affect us all – like planning, highways, education, health and social care, and the climate emergency – we'll have a stronger voice together as one council.

Q. Will I lose my local representative?

A. No. The new council will see councillors elected for the areas where parish councils currently exist – Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole. At the last elections in 2019, none of the parish councils had elections and so their councillors were appointed unopposed. The Town Council election saw 35 candidates standing for 18 seats so people had a choice. With 20 councillors on the new council, we'd expect this to be the same at the next election in 2024. This means that for the first time in many years everyone in Bridport will be able to choose the councillor for their area.

Q. Will my councillor just do what their political parties tell them to?

A. No. Bridport's town councillors work together for the good of the town and party politics doesn't feature in their decision-making. Some – but not all – identify with a political party, but you'll see that on the ballot paper – something that residents of Allington, Bothenhampton, Bradpole and Walditch don't currently get, so you will have a say in whether they get elected or not. For those living in those parishes, do you know what your parish councillor's politics are? Do you get the opportunity to find that out during an election campaign? No.

Q. Will councillors on the new council be paid allowances?

A. That depends on who you elect to the council – you can ask your candidates whether that's what they'll choose. Every town and parish council has the power to pay an allowance – an amount intended to cover expenses. Some, like Bridport Town Council, currently choose to do so and others don't. Town councillors receive about £65 a month (before tax) but don't get travel or other expenses. It's not a huge amount for attending up to 60 formal council meetings and countless other meetings and events every year, plus phone and computer costs dealing with residents' problems and issues and being on the end of a phone at all hours. Residents can of course always vote them out if they aren't worth it – but only if there is a competitive election as happens now in Bridport.

Q. We have 44 council seats across Bridport's town and parish councils at the moment. Won't we lose out by reducing that to 20?

A. No. Councils across the UK have much larger populations than the whole of Bridport (population 13,000), but do their job without the need for 44 councillors. Dorchester is a local example, with 20 councillors for 20,000 people. The parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole can't fill all of their seats, and none of their councillors were exposed to a competitive election, so it makes no sense to keep things as they are.

Q. How will the changes help Bridport in the future?

A. The whole town needs a stronger voice in its dealings with the new unitary Dorset Council, and it needs to be able to respond when Dorset Council changes local services. They've already cut funding for leisure, tourism, and community organisations and we think they're bound to reduce other services soon – street cleaning and public toilets for example. Will they listen to smaller parish councils when making these decisions? No. Will they

listen to one council representing the whole town? We think it's much more likely, and even if they proceed with cuts, a single council combining spending power of four councils will be better placed to step in and fill the gaps.

Q. The arguments seem to make sense, so why are people arguing against them?

A. Take away the speculative concerns about Council Tax (which can't be considered anyway when looking at how an area is governed), and the number of people arguing against is very small, mainly the current parish councillors who would have to stand in a competitive election if the proposals are approved, and they want to retain their councillor status.

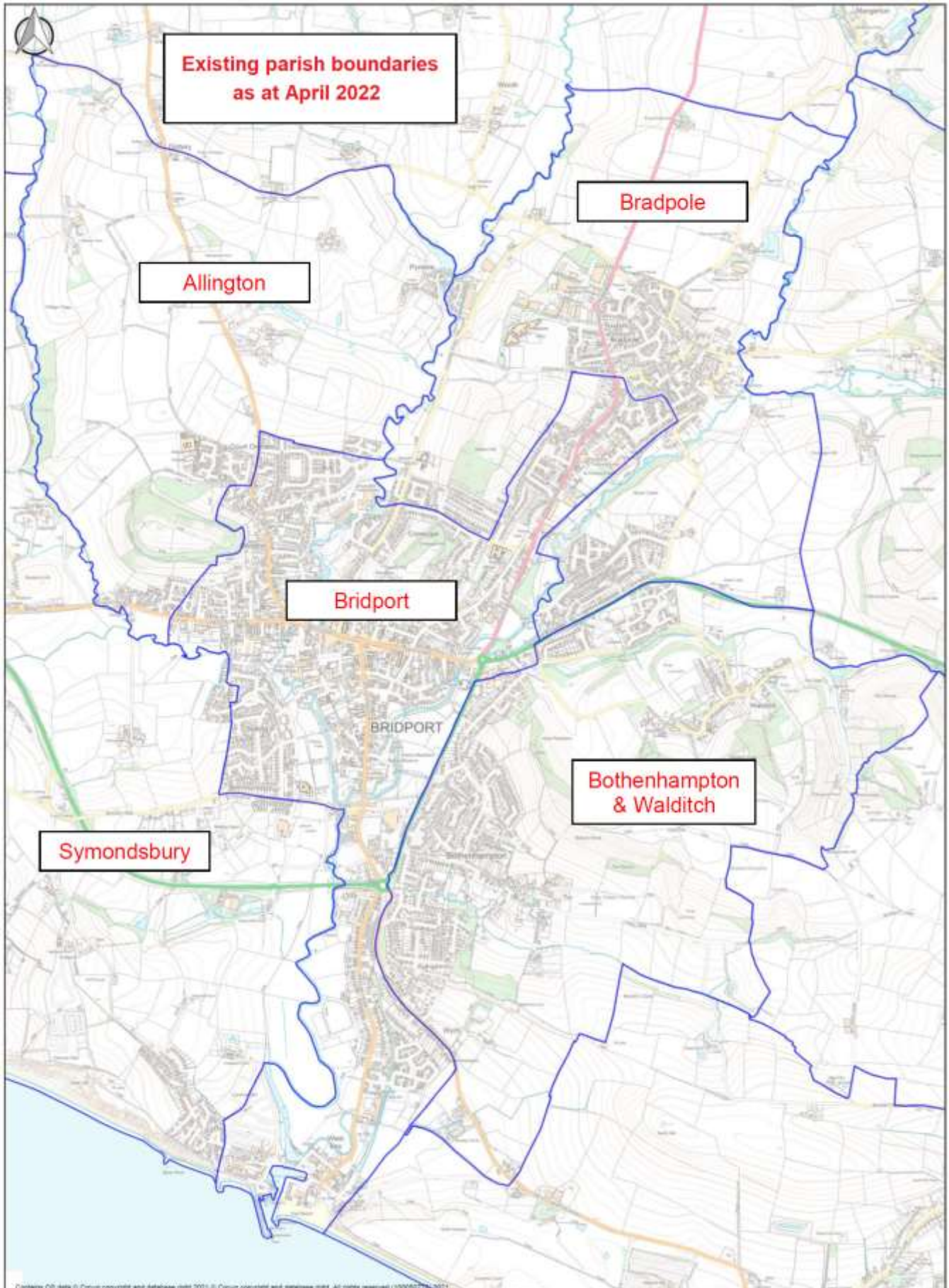
The current town councillors have no personal vested interest in proposing a merger. Currently 8 of our 18 councillors actually live in one of the surrounding parishes – but they all still support the change for a more inclusive, fair and effective Town Council that truly represents all the inhabitants of Bridport.

If they want to stay as councillors in 2024 they'll be exposed to election by a large number of people they've got no track record with, and some whose Council Tax they've just increased! The existing Town Council has statutory tax raising powers and doesn't need to expand if it really wants to bring in more money. Our argument is about fairness, democracy, strength of community voice, greater efficiency, and resilience for the future.

Q. I have more questions about the Town Council's proposal. Where do I find the answers?

A. See the information at <https://www.bridport-tc.gov.uk/one-council-for-bridport-better-stronger-fairer/>, or contact us – email enquiries@bridport-tc.gov.uk, tel. 01308 456722 or write to Bridport Town Council, Mountfield, Rax Lane, Bridport DT6 3JP.

Existing Parish Boundaries



Proposed Parish Boundaries

