

Bridport Town Council

Response to Dorset Council Consultation on Recommendations for a Review of Community Governance

1. Introduction

This submission confirms the support of Bridport Town Council, for the recommendations of Dorset Council to change the community governance arrangements in the Bridport area, as set out at

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/documents/35024/2091025/Community+Governance+Review+-+Final+Draft+Recommendations.pdf/b74d7686-42f3-6297-a31a-42c25f6b2193>

(pp 11-13).

The recommendations reflect the preferred option of the Town Council as proposed to Dorset Council in October 2021. The rationale for that option is restated in the form of an extract from our original submission at Appendix 1, and is included as a restatement of our arguments for these changes. This second submission, in response to the Dorset Council consultation launched in February 2022, provides further information and evidence to reaffirm the overwhelming case for the proposals, summarised as:

- A single Bridport parish comprising the existing built-up area of the town.
- The inclusion of the existing Bothenhampston & Walditch and Bridport parishes in their entirety.
- The inclusion of all of the existing Bradpole parish, except for one thin strip of agricultural land west of Pymore Road, which would become part of Symondsbury parish.
- The inclusion of the majority of the built-up area of the existing Allington parish and Allington Hill. Other more rural areas would become part of Symondsbury parish.
- The inclusion of West Cliff estate, and the majority of the Foundry Lea development area (both in the existing Symondsbury parish), with the reduction in electors in Symondsbury parish compensated for by the addition of part of Allington parish.
- Incorporation of eight dwellings into Bridport that are contiguous with the built-up area of West Bay, and are currently within Burton Bradstock parish.
- The division of the proposed Bridport parish into 5 wards, represented by 20 councillors.

Bridport Town Council also reaffirms its support for the proposals submitted by Symondsbury Parish Council, which provide for effective local government in the parish of Symondsbury and coordinate well with the proposals for Bridport.

The following additional information, provided under headings used in the earlier submission and conforming with the criteria for community governance reviews, offers further affirmation that these proposals are the best way forward for community governance in Bridport.

2. Identity

Our original submission showed how our proposals would protect local identities of traditional village areas within the built-up area of Bridport, whilst strengthening the

identity of Bridport as a whole. We reassert that contention at Appendix 1 and our further research has highlighted plentiful evidence that village identity is not linked to a parish or town council. Countless famous villages retain their distinctive identity, in spite of being part of a larger council area. A few prominent examples are Portmeirion (Penrhynedeudraeth), Mousehole (Penzance), Poundbury (Dorchester), Croyde (Georgeham), Dulwich (Southwark), and St Michael's Mount (Marazion).

Following the first CGR consultation, we have looked further at parish council concerns that very local identities may be undermined by the election of councillors who do not live within those localised areas. This contention is not borne out by the existing parish council arrangements – 4 out of 5 Allington parish councillors live outside the parish, 3 of 9 in Bradpole, and 8 of 18 in Bridport. No-one is arguing that this situation is currently undermining identity.

3. Effective and Convenient Local Government

The original submission at Appendix 1 highlights the capacity of a larger council area to protect and enhance local services. This is not to say, however, that the new council would be distant from its parishioners. The built-up area covered by the proposed expanded parish would increase from 1.25 square miles to approximately 2 square miles. Including wholly rural surrounding areas, the total parish area would be approximately 6 square miles. Weymouth parish is 11 square miles, Beaminster is 8, and Sturminster Newton 7.

Furthermore, the expanded Bridport parish would remain relatively small in administrative terms – around the 400th largest town/parish council in England and Wales by population (est. 13,500). Weston-super-Mare parish has a population of 80,000 (and incidentally incorporates 7 settlements). Other population estimates: Weymouth 53,000, Dorchester 21,000, Verwood 15,000, Ringwood 14,500, Gillingham 12,000, and Blandford 11,000.

Nor would the proposed reduction in the number of councillors – from 44 to 20 for the affected area – affect the ability of the council to serve its population of approximately 13,500. The proposed arrangements compare well in these terms with, for example, Weston-super-Mare (population 80,000, 31 councillors) and Dorchester (21,000, 20 councillors).

We reassert our original contention that the proposals will address the 'democratic deficit' that has resulted in contested elections disappearing in the parishes that adjoin Bridport. This is vital in ensuring effective local government and is highlighted by the National Association of Local Councils 'Good Councillor's Guide' which states that "It is better for democracy if councillors are elected rather than relying on co-option, so they can be confident that the council is the community's choice of representatives."

Effective local government is currently constrained in the three adjoining parishes, as none was qualified to use the General Power of Competence (GPOC) – the legislative tool that allows local councils to do anything unless the law prohibits it – at the last full election on 2 May 2019. GPOC requires two thirds of the Council to be elected. Without it, councils are limited in their powers – a particular concern when looking to provide new services and/or devolved responsibilities.

This constraint is exacerbated by the vacancies that continue to exist in the parish councils, as demonstrated when town councillors attended a recent meeting of one of the councils concerned – to discuss our proposals, only to find that the meeting was cancelled as no quorum could be achieved.

4. Community Cohesion

Our earlier submission, as shown at Appendix 1, outlined how cohesion is enhanced by a 'greater Bridport' community culture and the actions of the Town Council to support this. We also set out how the current financial arrangements lead to a sense of unfairness that affects community cohesion.

Subsequently, we have found further examples of how, beyond local government, localised community support is entirely organised around the needs of the Bridport area, rather than focused on individual parishes. Examples are Citizens Advice, the Youth & Community Centre, Foodbank, Churches, Chamber of Commerce, Leisure Centre, Rotary Club, Round Table, Transition Town Bridport, Dementia Friendly Bridport, Coronavirus Support Network, Allotments Society, Harmony Mental Health Support, Living Tree Cancer Support, and the History Centre. This is reflective of a cohesive Bridport community with common needs.

5. Community Engagement

In our original submission, we set out the wide engagement carried out in establishing support for our proposals. This support has subsequently been demonstrated to be overwhelming, with three quarters of public submissions to Dorset Council in favour of our preferred option. In recommending the changes, Dorset Council has recognised the strength of our arguments – indeed when the Council met to agree the recommendations, our submission was singled out for praise by the Leader of Dorset Council in his introductory speech.

Given this exceptional level of support, and the absence of any significant new counter-arguments since the recommendations were published, we do not consider there to be a need to redemonstrate community support. However, we have sought to gain views from the community and have elicited 151 expressions of support (excluding any submitted direct to Dorset Council) through (i) public engagement stalls in the town centre, (ii) social media and other online activity, and (iii) follow-up contact with residents who engaged with us during the preparation of the initial submission. These are shown at Appendix 2. Not only has the supportive response increased, but also, no-one who supported us then has subsequently withdrawn their support.

We have for a third time offered to meet with all of the affected parishes, but for a third time the offer has been declined or not responded to by Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole Parish Councils. A representative of Symondsburry Parish Council met with the Town Clerk to restate their support for the recommendations. The Town Council in turn supports the proposals put forward by Symondsburry Parish Council, which will provide for a sustainable rural parish and resolve other minor boundary anomalies. We understand that Burton Bradstock Parish Council has restated its support for the transfer of eight dwellings and one commercial property in an area contiguous with West Bay, into Bridport parish.

6. Views of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole Parish Councils

Our original submission set out responses to concerns raised by the parish councils at that time. We stand by those responses, and have established no new counter-arguments from them. Some of the original comments have been restated in a different form, such as:

- “Your parish councillors will no longer work for you”. In response, the Town Council contends that all existing parish councillors will have the opportunity to stand for election, in the areas they currently represent – or indeed in any of the five proposed wards. The statement appears to confirm that either they do not wish to face a contested election, or that they see no prospect of being elected by their local community. This only serves to reinforce existing concerns about a ‘democratic deficit’ in the parishes.
- “The parish clerk will be made redundant”. This statement is incorrect. Any member of staff employed by the affected councils has statutory protection under TUPE, and given the certainty that the new council will require additional clerking and administrative capacity to deliver the proposals, it is improper and premature to suggest that redundancies would arise. The Town Council is very disappointed that the employment affairs of a parish clerk have been used in this inappropriate way.
- “Bothenhampton and Walditch wards will be shrunk to a single BTC ward with only three Bridport councillors”. This statement fails to recognise that (i) the current arrangements mean that there are very few active councillors in Bothenhampton & Walditch parish, (ii) three councillors is quite sufficient given the level of officer support provided by a larger council, and (iii) those three councillors will focus on issues specific to that area, whilst for other matters that affect the entire Bridport area (for example the Local Plan, climate emergency, highway verge maintenance, Neighbourhood Plan), constituents will have 20 councillors acting on their behalf.
- “Your parish will be taken over by Bridport Town Council”. This is not the case. The proposals are a merger of four parishes to form an entirely new council, and the 13 councillors representing the three wards replacing the former parishes will outnumber 7 for the central and West Bay areas.
- “Your annual Council Tax payments will increase substantially”. Not only is this not a matter for the review, it is also impossible to predict. The new council would set its precept and, as with any other council, has the option of reducing, increasing or of not changing the level of precept levied on Council Tax payers. This statement also ignores the fact that the proposed new council will provide for a fairer system. At present, residents in some of the most deprived parts of the Dorset Council area, in Skilling and Court Orchard, are in effect subsidising wealthier residents.

7. Transitional Arrangements

Naturally, the focus of the Community Governance Review is on the best outcomes for future governance. The Town Council has however begun its consideration of transitional arrangements – not based on an assumption that the recommendations will be confirmed, but so that should the decision be to confirm, all parties are able to engage at the earliest opportunity in the process of change. We will seek to establish joint transitional working alongside the adjoining parish councils, use of third-party independent expertise such as that provided by the Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils, and existing relationships with our own contracted support services such as Human Resources. We also

consider that a process of wider community engagement would be required involving local residents and other public, private and community stakeholders, for wholly inclusive change management.

8. Conclusion

The preferred option set out in Bridport Town Council's CGR submission in October 2021 (see Appendix 1) attracted strong community support, meets the requirements of the review, and has been recommended by Dorset Council. Subsequently, community support has been reconfirmed and no significant new counter-arguments have been raised.

Whilst we remain open to discussions about the fine detail of the arrangements, we re-assert our contention that the recommendation for Bridport is the right one for the future governance of our community. It protects and enhances local identity, makes for more effective and convenient local government, and addresses shortcomings in community cohesion inherent in the existing system, arising from a lack of democracy and fairness.

The Town Council also supports the proposals for Symondsbury parish, which enable it to become a sustainable, rurally-focused council, and which fit well with the proposals for Bridport.



Cllr Ian Bark
Mayor of Bridport



Cllr Dave Rickard
Leader of Bridport Town Council

20 May 2022

Bridport Town Council

Extract from "Submission of Options for a Review of Community Governance" (October 2021)

1. Introduction

This submission sets out the range of issues for community governance since the last changes affecting Bridport parish were made in 1986, and identifies three options for consideration. Bridport Town Council contends that there are strong reasons to consider a wide-ranging change to boundaries, governance and electoral arrangements, and will recommend this as its preferred option. We urge Dorset Council to accept this and consider the rationale to be indisputable. We are concerned however to ensure that if there are as yet unidentified reasons for not taking this option forward, other narrower changes should be considered as a more basic requirement for the adequate provision of community governance in Bridport. Two further options are therefore presented; one considers a range of relatively minor boundary changes and the addition of an area designated for a forthcoming major housing development, and another is very narrowly focused on this forthcoming development. This third option is deemed essential.

The market town of Bridport is made up of several parishes. In addition to the Town Council area of Bridport Parish (population c.8,500), it also includes most of the parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch and Bradpole, and part of Symondsbury parish, which is soon to be greatly increased by the construction of up to 930 houses directly abutting the western edge of Bridport Parish at Foundry Lea (formerly Vearse Farm). The population of the surrounding parishes almost doubles the population of the community – approximately 15,000 in total. This submission is made in that context, and takes account of a decision of the principal council (at that time West Dorset District Council) in September 2018 recommending that "...Bridport Town Council resubmits its request to the Dorset Council after its creation in April 2019 in order that a more wide-reaching review, including the areas highlighted by local residents in the initial consultation, can be undertaken." The report accompanying this decision states that the areas concerned were Allington, Bradpole, Bothenhampton, Walditch, West Cliff Estate, Pine View, Skilling Hill Road, and Watton Park.

A very small number of residences in Burton Bradstock parish are contiguous with the Bridport parish boundary, and these are also considered in the submission.

The submission includes maps for the three options presented. Within the discussion part of the document there are references to a range of localised issues for which accompanying maps are not included, but which can be provided on request.

2. Post-War Development

In the Post War era the expansion of Bridport took place largely by 'infill' so that there is little by way of separation between parishes, creating a sense of a 'greater Bridport'. However the boundaries were not changed to incorporate the expansion within the jurisdiction of the Town of Bridport. This has resulted in a variety of anomalies.

It is estimated that since the end of WWII something in the region of 2,000 new houses have been built in the adjoining parishes. As indicated above, this figure will increase by almost half with the addition of the Foundry Lea development.

3. Public Service Provision

Bridport Town Council has expanded its operation in recent years to meet community expectations and to respond to the contraction of provision by principal councils. This expansion benefits residents of Bridport parish, but residents in adjoining areas also benefit to as great a degree from public services provided by Bridport Town Council as Bridport parish residents. Examples include:

- Open spaces – Bridport Town Council maintains a large number of recreational areas, sports pitches, meadows, formal gardens, and other public open spaces that are enjoyed by residents of both Bridport parish and the surrounding parishes.
- Markets – the town's street market and a range of speciality markets are managed by the Town Council and benefit both residents of the wider Bridport area, and the local economy.
- Tourist Information Centre – the Council's town centre information 'hub' is a vital support to the visitor economy but also provides community information to residents of the wider local area.
- Town events – the Town Council supports all of the larger events that form part of the annual events calendar – Food Festival, Beer Festival, Jurassic Fields Music Festival, Folk Festival, Carnival, Torchlight Procession, Hat Festival, Christmas Cheer, and Charter Fair. The Council also organises its own public events, such as the Community Fair, Remembrance Sunday Parade, weekly summer entertainment in Bucky Doo Square in the town centre, and supports a host of smaller community events. This major programme of mainly free events is open to residents from across the Bridport area, and maintains the town's reputation as 'Dorset's Eventful Town' – a major visitor draw providing a further boost for the local economy.
- Community Bus Service – this subsidised service runs through three of the surrounding parishes and provides access to the town centre for residents, particularly those with mobility difficulties and no access to private transport.
- Community buildings – Bridport Town Hall, WI Hall, the Salt House and Mountfield are widely used by community groups in the Bridport area and for public events.
- Financial support to externally-run community facilities – the Town Council provides significant financial support, supported by annually reviewed Service Level Agreements, to the Arts Centre, Leisure Centre, Museum, Bridport & District Citizens Advice, the Youth & Community Centre, the Literary & Scientific Institute, 20-20 Skate and Ride (indoor skate park) and West Bay Discovery Centre. Without this support, these facilities – benefiting the entire greater Bridport community – would struggle to operate.

This is not an exhaustive list, but gives an indication of the way in which the Town Council supports residents from an area far wider than its parish boundary.

A range of local services are outside the Bridport parish boundary, for example Bridport's Cemetery (Bothenhampton & Walditch parish), Sir John Colfox Academy (Bridport's Comprehensive Senior School, Bradpole parish), St Catherine's Catholic Primary School

(Bradpole parish), Bridport Leisure Centre and the adjoining Rugby Pitches (Symondsbury parish), Bridport Community Hospital (Allington parish), Gore Cross Industrial Estate (Bradpole parish), and the Indoor Skate Park (Bradpole parish) are all situated in adjoining parishes and not within the Bridport parish boundary. Some of these – the Leisure Centre and Indoor Skate Park – receive direct financial support from Bridport Town Council to sustain their viability. The Cemetery is owned and managed by Bridport Town Council.

Parish councils often lack the capacity or expertise to run services or manage facilities in their own areas and request assistance from Bridport Town Council. The most recent example of this is in relation to Jellyfields, a local wildlife and popular walking area, and Bothenhampton Nature Reserve. These lie in Bothenhampton & Walditch parish and are to be transferred to local ownership and management by Dorset Council. The parish council is keen to see this happen but cannot take on the burden. The Town Council has agreed to take ownership and manage the site, with a contribution of £500pa from the Parish Council, but this arrangement will require a funding/service agreement – a bureaucratic template that would have to be replicated for any future similar arrangements with neighbouring parishes.

This is not to say that neighbouring parish councils do not provide for their communities; they do. However, their capacity is limited and consequently it is inevitable that services provided in Bridport that are unavailable in a neighbouring parish, will attract residents from those parishes. The Town and surrounding parishes have developed good working relationships in a limited number of areas of service provision to address this issue – sharing costs in respect of the jointly-produced Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan, and contributions to the community bus are examples. The Town Council considers it unlikely that a cost-sharing mechanism could be agreed that covers most or all of the services from which neighbouring parishes benefit. There are no examples of parishes contributing to the cost of services wholly contained within Bridport parish that also benefit the surrounding parishes.

The Town Council recognises that Symondsbury parish, situated mainly at a distance from Bridport, differs from other surrounding parishes, in that its residents benefit to a lesser extent from the work of the Town Council, and it identifies as a rural parish, much of which is managed by the Symondsbury Estate which has recently improved facilities in the village.

4. Identity

Bridport parish contains two discernible traditional centres – the town centre and West Bay. Bothenhampton & Walditch parish similarly has two traditional village centres, albeit that the village of Bothenhampton is now subsumed within a much wider post-war expanse of residential development. Bradpole has two traditional centres – Bradpole and Pymore – with distinct identities, and Symondsbury village provides a historic and distinct identity for the parish. Allington does not contain a discreet or discernible traditional village centre.

Whilst Bradpole, Bothenhampton, Walditch and Symondsbury contain functioning village centres, only a fraction of the post war development can be seen to be an expansion of the historic villages. Most are clearly an accommodation of the expansion of the town of

Bridport into the extremities of those surrounding parishes. Larger examples are residential developments in the areas of Jessopp Avenue (Bradpole parish), Lower Walditch Lane, land east of Sea Road South and the Valley Road/Wanderwell estate (Bothenhampton & Walditch parish), Hospital Lane/Cherry Tree (Allington parish), and West Cliff (Symondsbury parish).

All five parishes making up the community contain significant tracts of green/rural land, albeit that in Bridport parish much of this is owned, managed, or otherwise influenced by the Town Council, whereas the rural land in surrounding parishes is largely privately owned. The consequence is a shared identity of part urban, part rural life, across the greater Bridport area.

Naturally, the existence or otherwise of a town or parish council in any given area, is not a major factor in a resident's thinking when considering their local identity, and changes to town or parish governance will not affect where people consider themselves to live. However, more than half of Town Council correspondence received from residents in the Bridport area is estimated to be from people who live outside the Bridport parish boundary. The notion that this means they consider themselves Bridport residents can be debated; what it clearly does indicate is that people from outside the parish identify the Town Council as 'their' council, and look to it to provide services, information and support. Eight of the Town Council's 18 councillors live in surrounding parish areas, a further indication of the same principle. Only 6 Bridport Mayors over the last 20 years have actually lived in the parish, whilst 14 have lived in the surrounding parishes.

By way of comparison, Poundbury is an example of a very distinct local identity, but the area is part of Dorchester parish. More locally, West Bay is commonly identified as separate from Bridport, but in the main is part of Bridport parish.

The Town Council recognises that Symondsbury parish in the most part does not share all of the same characteristics of Bridport and the three other surrounding parishes. Its main settlement in Symondsbury village is both rural in its nature and separated by a mile of open green land from the boundary of Bridport parish. It has a particularly strong sense of local identity as a consequence of this rural nature and its affiliation with the Symondsbury Estate.

In terms of public perception, the very design and layout of Bridport lends itself to the notion of a single cohesive settlement comprising Bridport parish and much of the surrounding area. As you enter Bridport from Dorchester, the roadside sign on the A35 proclaiming entry to "Bridport" is placed in Walditch. It is a further 750 metres until you arrive at a property which is not in either Bradpole or Walditch and within the Bridport Parish boundary. As you enter the town from the North on the A3066, you enter the 30mph zone, and then the built-up area which is in Bradpole for the first 600 metres. As you enter Bridport from the west, the first 500 metres of houses are in Symondsbury. The next 400 metres of housing is in Allington before you reach the Bridport boundary at West Road Garage. Arriving from the south east, it is a journey of 1km beyond the 'Welcome to Bridport' sign before you encounter any property to the east side that is within Bridport parish. In all of these cases there is no discernible transition from the surrounding parish to the parish of Bridport – it is to all intents and purposes a single settlement.

5. Effective and Convenient Local Government

The contraction of principle local government, followed by the creation of a unitary Dorset Council, has created challenges for town and parish councils in the area, particularly in 'stepping up' as the now second tier of local government in their areas. Bridport Town Council, as one of the larger councils in Dorset, has responded positively to protect and enhance services in its area. The Council has taken on devolved responsibility for a number of services that were at risk of reduction or withdrawal. Examples include highway verge maintenance, the Tourist Information Centre, management of parks and meadowland, some areas of licensing, creation of a community bus service, and the rescue of the Youth & Community Centre. The Council is positive about further devolution, and is currently looking to take over responsibility for public conveniences and other assets from Dorset Council. The Council's aim is to maximise local control and provision of services by, and for, the community. Smaller parish councils, such as those surrounding the parish of Bridport, are unlikely to have the resources or capacity to respond in the same way for their parishioners. Whilst it is accepted that parishes may not want to do this at all, the pressures on public service provision for Bridport Town Council, as set out earlier in this submission, are considerable and limit the scope for further devolution.

The creation of a unitary authority has also created a challenge for local democracy. Three members for this new authority took the place of nine for the previous county and district councils in the now Bridport ward of Dorset Council. This has arguably placed an increased distance between citizens and their elected members, and diluted the influence of town and parish councils. Conversely, the pressure for greater local control of services remains.

The inability of parish councils to bridge this 'democratic gap' is in contrast to the success of the Town Council. Currently the surrounding parishes do have Parish Councils but struggle to attract councillors. Many do not have the full quota of democratically elected councillors, and so almost never have elections. None of the surrounding parish councils had a contested election in May 2019 and all required the co-option of members to fill the available seats. In 2019, 35 candidates stood for 18 seats in Bridport. In Allington, 4 stood for 7 seats. In Bothenhampton & Walditch, 7 stood for 9 seats (initially one candidate, with a further six identified in late May). In Bradpole, 5 stood for 10 seats. In Symondsbury, 7 stood for 8 seats. The shortfall in candidates for the surrounding parish seats was 11 – while there were 17 'excess' candidates in Bridport. The 23 that were elected to serve on the four parish councils in 2019 were elected unopposed. Further councillors have been co-opted since the election, but none of the parishes list a full complement on their websites at the time of drafting this submission. Indeed, several Bothenhampton & Walditch parish councillors have resigned since the 2019 election, and not all have been replaced through co-option. In reviewing community governance arrangements there is clearly a need and an opportunity to address this democratic deficit.

In terms of effective local government across the Bridport area, it is to be noted that the Bridport ward for Dorset Council **and** the designated area for the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan both marry exactly with the five parishes of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bradpole, Bridport, and Symondsbury. The Town Council contends that it makes abundant sense to make the best of this alignment across different tiers of local

government, and that this is best served by a common vision and direction across the five parishes. There is precedent for this approach – prior to the reorganisation of local government in 1974, both Bridport Municipal Borough and Bridport Rural District Council included parts of the current adjoining parishes. The Diocesan Parishes of Bridport, West Bay, Allington, Bradpole, and Bothenhampton & Walditch coalesced to form the Bridport Team Ministry 35 years ago, recognising the benefits of joint administration across the parishes. The settlement of Bridport as identified in the draft Dorset Council Local Plan in January 2021 aligns very closely with the area bounded by the four parishes of Allington, Bradpole, Bridport, and Bothenhampton & Walditch.

The Town Council recognises that Symondsburry parish faces less of a challenge in terms of attracting parish council candidates for election, and that its separation and rural nature means that a vision for its future may not coalesce to the same extent as those parishes predominantly within the built-up area of Bridport.

6. Community Cohesion

The whole town of Bridport has a strong sense of local identity and community spirit. Residents come together for the town's large community events, and gather in the town centre in what is arguably one of the most sociable environments imaginable. There is little that divides the community, despite the varied backgrounds of its residents. We are urban and rural, lifelong and recent, agricultural and industrial, wealthy and of limited means, coastal and inland, traditional and quirky, modern and heritage, young and old, artistic and scientific, left and right. These varied traits are no barrier to social, economic, environmental and community cohesion. The local response to Covid-19 is an outstanding recent indication of this – led by the Town Council, community groups supported by 170 volunteers from across the greater Bridport area set up a single support network that assisted over 2,000 of those left vulnerable by the pandemic. The people we supported were residents of the entire Bridport area, and not confined to Bridport parish.

Whilst the level of precept/Council Tax levied on residents is not a matter for the review, its impact on community cohesion is arguably an increasing factor. The tax base (the number of combined Band D equivalent households paying a precept) for Bridport Town Council is 3,000. The figure within the surrounding parishes paying a much reduced 'parish tax' rate is 2,728. This has resulted in an increasing number of complaints from Bridport parishioners, that residents of neighbouring parishes receive the services of the Town Council at a heavily discounted rate. Whilst the symptom of this weakness in cohesion is related to Council Tax, the cause is the governance arrangements in a single built-up residential area.

Some efforts have been made in recent years to reach agreement over parish contributions to Town Council costs. There have been modest successes with 'one-off' projects, for example with some parishes contributing to the Town Council's community bus service and all parishes meeting the cost of administering the Neighbourhood Plan. However, there are no examples of parishes contributing to the cost of services wholly contained within Bridport parish – such as the majority of those listed at 3 above – that also benefit the surrounding parishes.

The Town Council recognises that community cohesion in Symondsbury parish is strong and less affected by the issues discussed in this section.

It is of note here that a previous community governance submission in 2018 by the Town Council – primarily aimed at incorporating the Foundry Lea (then Vearse Farm) development into the parish – was halted by the principal council (at that time West Dorset District Council). This decision recommended that Bridport Town Council resubmit its request following the creation of the unitary authority, in order that a more wide-reaching review could be carried out, including areas highlighted by local residents in an initial consultation. The report accompanying this decision states that the areas concerned were Allington, Bradpole, Bothenhampton, Walditch, West Cliff Estate, Pine View, Skilling Hill Road, and Watton Park.

7. Specific Boundary Anomalies

This submission has so far focused on the broader issues presented for community governance by Bridport's current arrangements. The Town Council recognises that these issues of principle may not be universally accepted. However, the Council considers that there can be little argument about the anomalous arrangements, where currently, many localised areas are split between Bridport & another parish. The Council highlights:

- Eight houses on the eastern side of West Bay (plus 4 more for which planning consent exists) are within the Parish boundary of Burton Bradstock. These are contiguous with the Bridport parish boundary but are two miles from the settlement of Burton Bradstock. Burton Bradstock Parish Council has approached Bridport Town Council with a proposal that these homes be included in Bridport parish.
- The West Cliff estate at the west end of West Bay is a private estate – comprising 129 properties, wholly within the parish of Symondsbury but lying some three miles from the village of Symondsbury. This estate has no direct road link with the parish without going back through Bridport parish, via either the centre of Bridport, or the A35 trunk road.
- 20 houses on the west side of, and 5 older houses on the southern end of Magdalen Lane south of the Symene River, and the whole of Pine View (67) are also in the parish of Symondsbury, whilst being most closely associated with, and adjoined to, the Skilling area of Bridport parish. These houses will be 'sandwiched' between the proposed Foundry Lea development and the current Bridport parish boundary.
- Around 90 houses on the north side of West Allington to the west of De Legh Grove, including two past the Symene Bridge are in the Parish of Allington. The boundary actually cuts right across Houndsell Way and De Legh Grove, separating adjoining houses within the street into two parishes.
- Hospital Lane Estate has some 200 houses, all also in the parish of Allington, but clearly designed to be an adjunct to the North Allington area of Bridport.
- The relatively new 56-house estate of Dibdin View was built on land completely in Allington Parish as a boundary change was not possible at the time, but with an agreement that Magna Housing would instigate a transfer to Bridport Parish at the earliest opportunity. This is that first opportunity.
- Around 120 houses, including those in Claremont Gardens, Beaumont Avenue & St Cecilia's estate on land to the south of Watton Hill are integral to the extended

- development northwards from Bridport. These houses are in Bradpole Parish, albeit contiguous with those in Bridport. Watton Gardens just to the north has 5 houses, 4 are in Bradpole and the boundary passes through the 5th which is in Bridport parish.
- Approximately 175 relatively new homes are situated immediately to the south of the A35 East Road, as you enter Bridport. These are within Bothenhampton & Walditch parish, surround the Cemetery that is owned and managed by the Town Council, and are commonly perceived as being part of Bridport.
 - Approximately 300 homes sit immediately to the north of the A35 East Road, and are in Bradpole parish, but are separated from the rest of the parish by green space and have a closer geographical relationship with Bridport.
 - Outline planning approval is in place for 760 homes and other infrastructure at Foundry Lea (formerly Vearse Farm), an area of land in Symondsbury parish, but with little geographical relationship with the rest of the parish. The site immediately borders the Skilling area of Bridport, is close to the town centre, and will undoubtedly consider Bridport as the source of its services. The proposed access routes connect with Bridport rather than Symondsbury parish. The draft Dorset Council Local Plan allows for a further expansion of this development beyond the 760 already approved in outline.

8. Conclusion and Options

A number of key issues arise from the discussion on previous pages of this submission:

- The development of the built-up area of Bridport since WWII, and in particular since the last review of the parish boundary, has created a single settlement with no discernible transition between Bridport parish and three of the four surrounding parishes. This pattern of the town's evolution will continue, with the addition of the Foundry Lea development and other smaller allocated housing sites such as on land east of Bredy Veterinary Centre and land adjacent to Bridport Hospital.
- Surrounding parish residents represent a large proportion of the users/beneficiaries of Town Council services, and yet have no direct say in their provision and do not contribute to their costs. Residents of Bridport parish subsidise this arrangement and no solution has been identified to address this, within the current governance arrangements.
- A single 'Bridport' identity is strong across Bridport parish and three of the four surrounding parishes. There are local centres that identify within that single identity. For example within Bridport parish, local identity is retained in West Bay despite the majority of the area being in Bridport parish. There is however little evidence that the existence of a parish council is a strong determinant in local identity in the Bridport area.
- The existing parish arrangements are not fit for purpose in responding to the challenges of effective local government, following the creation of a unitary Dorset Council.
- Local democracy is not well served by the current governance arrangements in the conjoined parishes, with only those electors in Bridport parish given the opportunity to exercise a meaningful electoral choice.
- Community cohesion is significantly undermined by the sense that Bridport residents are meeting the cost of services provided to residents of surrounding parishes, and by the inability of those surrounding parish residents to have a meaningful say in service provision.

- This sense of unfairness is exacerbated by the fact that two areas in Bridport parish – Court Orchard and Skilling – are among the most deprived in the Dorset Council area. The anomalous situation of these residents in effect subsidising residents of relatively wealthy residents' use of Town Council services has not been resolved under the existing arrangements, despite the best efforts of the Town Council to engage with neighbouring parish councils.
- Most of these challenges are of lesser impact and concern in respect of Symondsbury parish.

The Town Council's contention is that these issues are best resolved by the creation of a single 'Greater Bridport' parish boundary comprising the existing Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bradpole, and Bridport parishes, divided into wards that respect the identities of those areas and a fair representation in terms of numbers of councillors. The detail of this proposal is set out as Option 1 below.

Option 1 is our preferred option and best resolves the issues highlighted in this submission. It represents a major change to community governance in the area and whilst the Town Council considers it to be the optimal approach for the foreseeable future, we recognise from our discussions with the affected parish councils (other than Symondsbury and Burton Bradstock Parish Councils) that it will not have their support. Our contention is that parish council opposition does not equate to community opposition and that with the exception of the potential impact on Council Tax in the surrounding parishes, there is unlikely to be a significant rational counter-argument. The issue of Council Tax is not part of the review, except insofar as it presents a concern for community cohesion under the current arrangements, with a sense that one part of Bridport is unfairly and inequitably subsidising other parts. Nonetheless, we offer further options for consideration, in the event that the review decides against our preferred change. These options are to protect the basic integrity and governance requirements of Bridport parish in the years to a further review.

In order to maintain a viable Symondsbury parish, and with the agreement of Symondsbury Parish Council, Option 1 includes a limited compromise on the principles of the submission, affecting the western boundary of the proposed Bridport parish.

[Reference to Options 2 and 3 omitted here as no longer relevant]

Bridport Town Council's preference for Option 1 was not its starting position; rather it was the perhaps inevitable conclusion of a process. Initially, councillors focused on their previous submission in 2018 relating to the Foundry Lea (then Vearse Farm) development, Option 3. Consideration of this, alongside the principal council's advice to pursue other anomalies highlighted at that time, led to Option 2. Discussion of this option however simply highlighted the fractured, unfair, and undemocratic nature of community governance arrangements in Bridport. Option 1 resolves this 'broken' system, and sets the town on a path of better governance for the foreseeable future. We strongly urge Dorset Council to help us deliver this by approving Option 1.

9. Community Engagement

In preparing this submission, Bridport Town Council has engaged widely:

Meetings have been held with all of the surrounding parish councils. From this we have enlisted the support of Symondsbury Parish Council for our proposals, and the minor change at the boundary with Burton Bradstock Parish was requested by its Parish Council.

The three Parish Councils for Allington, Bradpole and Bothenhampton & Walditch have indicated via the media – although not direct to the Town Council – that they oppose our proposals. We have twice offered to meet with all of them to discuss the proposals, but this invitation has to date been declined. This is disappointing but in fact reflective of a wider reluctance to engage in matters affecting the whole town of Bridport, as discussed earlier in this document. Our invitation remains open.

Our agreement with Symondsbury Parish Council, detailed in Option 1 below, is indicative of the Town Council's willingness to enter into constructive discussions with surrounding parishes, and to compromise where appropriate. We also consider that the support of an adjoining parish for the principles and the detail of our proposals is a strong independent viewpoint from the locality. This is an indication that the opposition of three other parish councils is based solely on a 'self-protective' instinct, rather than any meaningful arguments aligned with the requirements of the review. To the extent that their professed concerns are known, these are addressed in section 10 below.

Our proposals have been subject to public scrutiny at a full Town Council meeting, and we have outlined our proposals at meetings of local groups including Bridport Business Chamber and West Bay Community Forum.

The proposals have been published on our website and social media channels, and we have liaised with the local newspaper to explain our plans.

Town councillors held an outdoor engagement event as part of Bridport Charter Fair in the town centre on 25 September 2021, giving residents the opportunity to see the proposals and discuss them with councillors.

We have engaged directly with the residents of Bridport parish via a leaflet delivered to every address in the parish. This set out our proposals and encouraged residents to engage with the Community Governance Review, via the Dorset Council website and email address.

For those without internet access or wishing to write to the Town Council, our leaflet included a tear-off slip for completion. **134 people have taken up this offer, all offering written support for our proposals.** This information, including the name, address and signature of each sender, is held by the Town Council and is provided to Dorset Council under separate cover.

Overall, the response to our proposals has been overwhelmingly supportive. This response includes communication from residents of the surrounding parishes who recognise the

issues we have highlighted and support our proposed solution. The following extract from a representation from a resident of Bothenhampton & Walditch Parish is typical of the comments we have received:

"I live in Bothenhampton. While I heard the initial proposal, the gut feeling was a "No". The idea of being in a governed parish is quite quaint and it feels like a step towards losing heritage. I went to Bridport Council meeting on the 21st Sep to listen in... Post the meeting, my view has changed on the following grounds that I wanted to share:...

- Equality... we will all be set to an equal foot in terms of payment.
- Services: I realise that I go to Bridport town council should I need a service...
- Affinity: I have a greater sense of affinity with Bridport due to its events but as well by the actions of the Council notably the Mayor who is inspiring great movements such as the Litter Free Bridport. The meeting of the 21 Sep made me question what I actually knew about Bothenhampton Parish Council which equated to zero having lived here for nearly 6 years."

...

"I think the idea of having a representative for the Parish at the extended Bridport Council is a good step towards a conciliatory approach."

It is of note that this correspondent was initially opposed to the proposals, but changed their view having listened to the arguments.

Another supportive correspondent from the neighbouring Bradpole parish highlights their affinity with Bridport Town Council, alongside concerns about the lack of democracy within their parish:

"Through my letterbox recently I received an "ALERT" leaflet on this matter, presumably from Bradpole Parish Council. As a result, i have quickly looked at their website to see how the parish council is valued.

"I was disappointed to see that our parish councillors seem to be co-opted, and can presume that not enough candidates come forward to be elected. (yet their leaflet refers to "Your elected council"). And not all councillors seem to have declared their interests.

"As I live so close to Bridport, I regularly use the facilities that BTC provides, so it seems only fair that i pay towards them - I am not so sure that i use facilities that Bradpole provides. The review must surely recognise that the time for small parishes like mine around Bridport is over, and that efficiency requires an aggregation into one local parish/town council that serves us all, centred on Bridport."

10. Views of Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, and Bradpole Parish Councils

As indicated in 9 above, our repeated invitation to these councils to discuss our submission has been to date declined, so we have no formal indication of their views. However, a leaflet circulated to some residents of these parishes gives a sense of their concerns. These are outlined below, along with the Town Council's response. The headings in quotes are those shown on the parish leaflet:

- **“Your historic parish disappears”**

Response: The proposals in option 1 of our draft submission make clear that we would respect the identity of the former parishes, with wards and committees specifically dedicated for this purpose. There is absolutely no reason why this arrangement could not celebrate and remind local residents of the historic parish boundaries and the wider history of those local areas.

- **“Your elected parish council no longer exists”**

Response: Our proposed warding arrangements mean that the elected councillors would represent areas that respect local identities with the possibility of ward committees. In addition, we are also suggesting that local consultative groups be established, so that anyone with a passion for their area can get involved in making that area better. We think this will enhance democracy, accountability, community cohesion, and engagement in a way that is not possible with the current arrangements. The word ‘elected’ as used by the parish councils is somewhat misleading to residents, as it implies an opportunity to vote – an opportunity that is not currently afforded to them.

- **“The parish website would vanish”**

Response: There is no reason why a ward could not have its own pages within the new parish’s website, with the original content from the parish council website included.

- **“Current lines of communication for concerns/requests/action would be gone”**

Response: Residents would have their own locally elected ward councillors and would be provided with lines of communication through the ‘one stop’ reception and offices at Mountfield, and through the Tourist Information Centre. The current lines of concerns do not work well, as more than 50% of enquiries to the Town Council are actually from residents of the surrounding parishes. Becoming a unified parish would obviate that confusion, and the extended operating hours afforded by our facilities would enhance residents’ ability to engage with their council.

- **“All monies currently available to your parish council would be spent by BTC”**

Response: All funds would be unified. However, our proposals provide for a voice for local areas based on the current parish geography and, significantly, as a larger parish we would have more power to attract outside funds for community projects.

- **“Your Council Tax would increase, in some cases by over a £ hundred, in line with the BTC Council Tax”**

Response: The level of Council Tax is of course not a matter for the review, but the issue of fairness is. The two areas of Bridport with the most poverty would see a decrease in tax, and all residents would pay fairly towards the running of the town’s facilities.

The Town Council has responded to the three parish councils in this vein, and reassuring them that, should our proposals be accepted, we will involve them in the transitional arrangements over the next two years so that their concerns can be fully allayed. Our reply invited the councils to meet with them, but we have received no response from any of them.

Option 1

This option creates a single 'Greater Bridport' parish boundary comprising the majority of the existing Allington, Bothenhampton & Walditch, Bradpole, and Bridport parishes, divided into five wards that respect the identities of those areas and a fair representation in terms of numbers of councillors. Symondsbury parish is affected but maintained as a separate rural parish. A minor change to the boundary between Bridport and Burton Bradstock parish is proposed. The key points are:

- A single Bridport parish comprising the existing built-up area of the town. The total electorate is 11,303.
- The existing Bothenhampton & Walditch and Bridport parishes are included in their entirety.
- All of Bradpole parish is included, except for one thin strip of land to the west of Pymore Road, which would become part of Symondsbury parish.
- The built-up area of Allington parish, and Allington Hill are included. The rural area would become part of Symondsbury parish.
- West Cliff estate, and the majority of the Foundry Lea development area of Symondsbury parish are included in the proposed Bridport parish, with the reduction in electors in part compensated for by the addition of the rural part of Allington parish.
- The proposed Bridport parish is divided into 5 wards, represented by 20 councillors as follows:

Ward	Councillors
Allington & West Bridport	5
Bothenhampton & Walditch	3
Bradpole	5
Central Bridport	5
West Bay	2
Total	20

This option resolves the issues identified earlier in the document, confirming a single Bridport entity and identity throughout almost all of the built-up area, whilst retaining local parish identities through the warding arrangements. It provides for good governance and public services through a single council, and a strong likelihood that all seats would be filled through contested elections. The proposals also provide a strong community voice as the second tier of local government in the Dorset Council area. It also facilitates engagement between the unitary council and the community, in that communication will be between two councils instead of five on issues of mutual interest.

Option 1 also provides for reduced bureaucracy in the monitoring and delivery of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan, by a reduction from five participating councils to two. This is of particular benefit in relation to Plan projects, whose funding and project plans are subject to individual 'sign-off' by each participating council.

Symondsbury parish is recognised as being a rural parish with a separate local identity that warrants a separate parish. Most of the built-up areas that are currently contiguous with

Bridport are included in the proposed Bridport parish, including the majority of Foundry Lea, the area formerly known as Vearse Farm where up to 930 homes are expected to be built on the edge of Bridport.

Recognising the need to ensure that Symondsbury Parish Council remains as a viable entity, we have engaged in constructive discussions with parish councillors and have agreed a compromise that offsets most of the houses 'lost' to Symondsbury parish without significantly undermining the principles of the Town Council's proposals. The agreement involves:

- The retention of an area to the west of the Foundry Lea development site, which is expected to provide the 'low density' housing along with some community facilities;
- The inclusion of a small area of housing to the north of West Road/West Allington in Symondsbury parish. These houses currently reside in Allington Parish and to a small extent Bridport parish;
- The retention of Watton Park as part of Symondsbury parish. Whilst this area is adjoined to Bridport parish, it has some affiliation with the neighbouring area of Watton village, which lies in Symondsbury parish;
- The addition to Symondsbury of the rural part of the existing Allington parish.

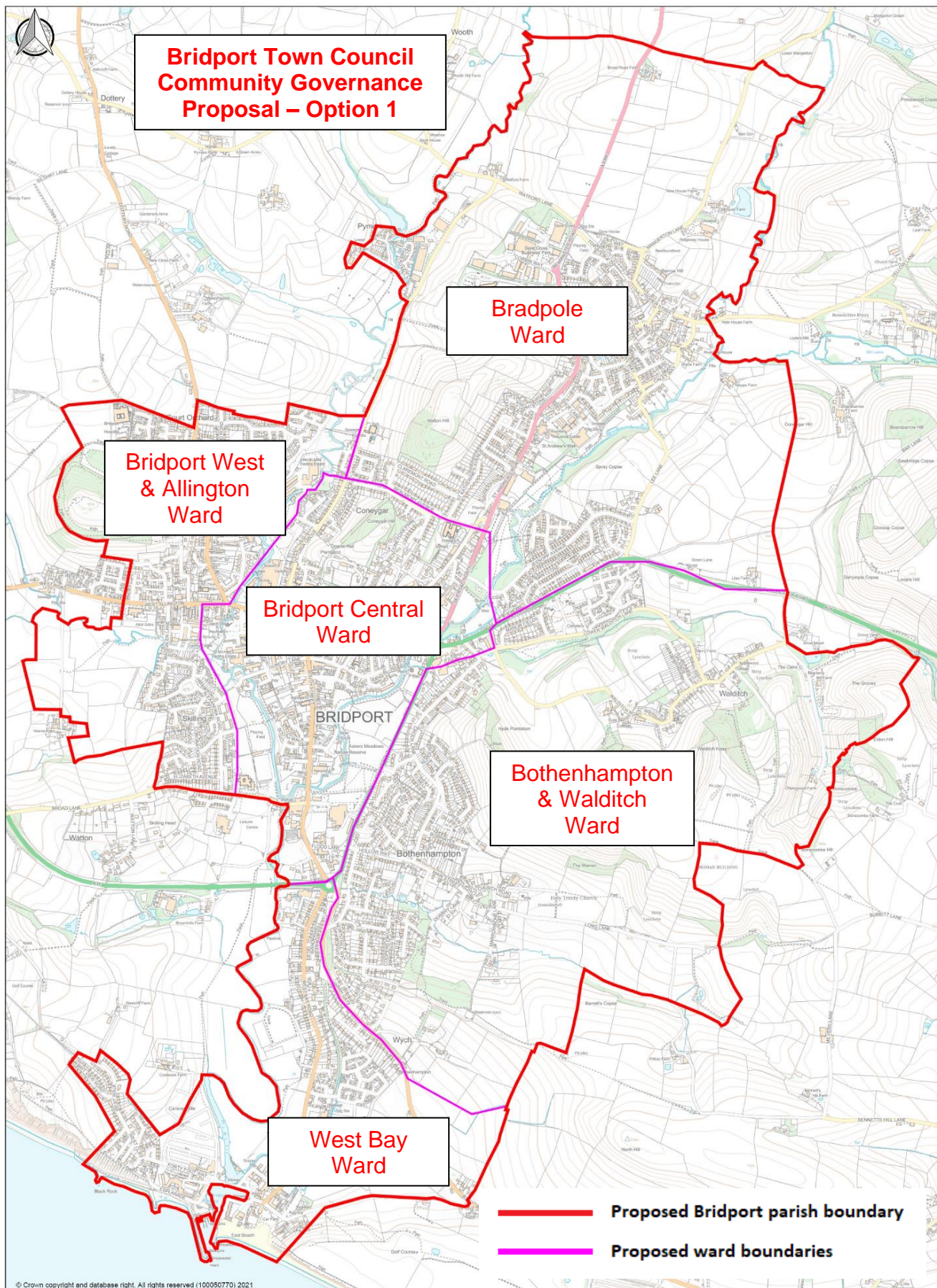
This arrangement has the formal support of Symondsbury Parish Council.

A minor change in the boundary between Bridport and Burton Bradstock parish, requested by Burton Bradstock Parish Council, incorporates eight dwellings into Bridport that are contiguous with the built-up area of West Bay.

Overall, this option provides the best solution for Bridport for a period of up to 15 years until the next required review of community governance, provided the Foundry Lea development is delivered as currently planned, and subject to any other unexpected developments contiguous with the proposed Bridport parish boundary. We would ask that Dorset Council considers triggering a further focused review in such circumstances.

We also recognise that the fine detail of this proposal – including the warding arrangements – may benefit from further engagement with Dorset Council, neighbouring parish councils, and local residents. The Town Council stands ready to engage in this process following a recommendation to proceed based on Option 1 by Dorset Council.

Maps showing (i) the existing parish boundary, and (ii) the proposed parish and ward boundaries for Option 1 are shown on the following two pages.



[Reference to Options 2 and 3 omitted here as no longer relevant]

Appendix 2 – Expressions of Support, April/May 2022

[151 INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT REDACTED FOR PUBLICATION]