



Report to Cabinet

Subject Ravenshead Parish Council – Request for Boundary Change

Date 4th August 2005

Author Chief Executive

Attached at Appendix 1 is a copy of a letter which I have received from the Chairman to Ravenshead Parish Council. Attached at Appendix 2 is a copy of my reply. Bearing in mind that Mr Lonergan asked for his letter to be published in the Ravenshead News, I have similarly provided my reply to the editor of the News for publication.

As Members will see, the Parish Council is asking for the views of the Cabinet on their willingness to support a boundary change to place Ravenshead back in Newark & Sherwood.

On the procedural issue, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services advises that any such boundary change would be initiated by the Secretary of State requesting advice on the proposal from the Boundary Commission, which would in turn then direct the Boundary Committee for England to conduct a review. The first step would accordingly be for the Parish Council to write to the ODPM setting out their case. The general principals which should guide the Boundary Committee are that any proposals should be based on natural communities and take account of people's expressed preferences. Any changes should be worthwhile and cost effective over time, and local authority areas should be such that authorities can carry out their functions effectively and in ways that meet community interests.

Members instructions are requested on how they would wish to respond to the Parish Council.

RAVENSHEAD PARISH COUNCIL

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21st June 2005

**Mr Peter Murdock
Chief Executive
Gedling Borough Council
Arnot Hill Park
Gedling
Nottingham NG5 6LU**

Dear Peter,

You may recall that in 1987 the Ravenshead Village was formed out of parts of Newstead and Blidworth Parishes. The two halves of the Village were united. One of the outcomes of this change was that the whole Village became part of Gedling Borough Council, rather than Newark & Sherwood District Council, although this was not a universally popular decision at the time.

In the light of a number of considerations covered below, the Ravenshead Parish Council is now questioning the wisdom of the latter decision and is addressing the question as to whether we can now affiliate with Newark & Sherwood. We would appreciate your advice on the viability of such a move and any observations from the Gedling Cabinet and Council about their willingness to support this change.

You will appreciate that we are the most northerly of the Gedling Parishes and that we face outwards, not inwards, for many of our services. Gedling PCT provides no services to Ravenshead with all our Primary Care coming from Newark & Sherwood PCT. Our secondary health provision is primarily from King's Mill Hospital in Ashfield rather than City or Queens Hospitals. One of our two Primary Schools is serviced from Newark and most of our Secondary School provision is from Rainworth. None of our Village Leisure Services is provided directly by Gedling Borough, as is the case in most of the rest of the Borough.

There is a perception in the Village that Gedling Borough Council has essentially an urban focus which accords with the majority of your catchment area – to the detriment of rural villages like Ravenshead. Newark & Sherwood is alternatively, more rural in character and more likely to be sympathetic to our needs. There is also a considerable risk that Gedling will be caught up in future restructuring which will bring the Borough into the Nottingham conurbation and Ravenshead would not want to be so placed at the northern end of such an amalgamation.

Appendix 1

The direction of Local Planning decisions has heightened the concerns of the Parish Council since we perceive a clear move towards the urbanisation of Ravenshead, supported by Gedling Borough Council. Gedling seems unable to stem the tide of back garden development, the continual loss of our trees, the breaching of the Special Character Area, knock-down and multiple re-build projects and the latest decision to sacrifice our Green Belt at the behest of an Inspector who took the view that there should be "a greater diversity in the Village housing stock" with high density housing on Cornwater Fields. Without any real consideration of the views of the vast majority of our people expressed at all stages of the Local Plan, nor any real consideration of Village sustainability, the Borough has cheerfully supported Green Belt loss – despite the fact that acceptance of the 2004 JSP would make this all unnecessary.

We believe that Newark & Sherwood District will be more sympathetic to the needs and aspirations of Ravenshead Village and will be much less likely to engage in future in the sort of hostile debate which has just occurred between Urban Gedling Borough Council and its Rural Parishes.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Lonergan
Chairman Ravenshead Parish Council

Copies to Ravenshead District Councillors

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Chief Executive

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Our Ref: 05-095SK
Your Ref:

Date: 15th July 2005

Dear Joe,

Thank you for your letter of 21st June 2005.

I have to say that I am both surprised and very disappointed at the suggestion in your letter that Ravenshead in some way suffers from its inclusion in the Borough of Gedling and that the village would be better off being part of the neighbouring district of Newark & Sherwood. I do not accept that Gedling Borough Council 'has essentially an urban focus ... to the detriment of rural villages like Ravenshead'. On the contrary - Ravenshead has enjoyed the benefit of very substantial support from this Council and I am disappointed that this can be so casually dismissed by the Parish Council. I would like to put the record straight on a number of the points made in your letter.

It is particularly surprising that you should suggest that the Parish would be better off in Newark & Sherwood District when you bear in mind that the Council tax levied by Newark & Sherwood District Council is over 15% higher than that levied by Gedling Borough Council. I think it is also worth bearing in mind that Gedling Borough Council, in the recent Audit Commission Comprehensive Performance Assessments of all District Councils in the County, was one of only two Councils to be assessed as "good" (the other Council, of course, being Rushcliffe Borough Council). None of the other Councils achieved such a high rating. Indeed, in talking about Gedling Borough Council, the Audit Commission paid tribute to the Council's 'long history of consistently delivering high quality basic services at reasonable cost', which the Commission described as 'impressive' – and this for a level of Council tax which is lower than that of neighbouring Councils.

Not only does Gedling Borough Council provide excellent services to the Parish at a very low level of Council tax, but it also gives to the Parish Council revenue grant aid of the order of £34,500 per annum and capital grant aid of the order of £8,000 per annum on top to assist the Parish Council in the provision of services in the village – I am not aware that such financial assistance is made available by Newark and Sherwood District Council as a matter of course to their Parish Councils .

Appendix 2

This Council also puts considerable effort and resources into supporting Ravenshead and the other Parishes in other ways - as I am sure the Ravenshead Ward Members on Gedling Borough Council will be able to confirm to you. Quite apart from the support which we have given to the Parish Council in the preparation of the Parish Plan, the Gedling Local Strategic Partnership, which was set up by the Borough Council, has representatives on it from both the Rural Community Council and the Parish Councils. As part of its work in developing a new community strategy for the whole Borough the partnership is expressly committing itself to 'rural proofing' all proposals in the action plan in order to ensure that the necessary rural focus is maintained.

I note your suggestion that many of Ravenshead's services are provided from outside the Borough and that no services are provided for you by the Gedling Primary Care Trust. It will inevitably be the case that, for a settlement located such as Ravenshead, some services will be provided from outside. We are, however, already planning with the Gedling Primary Care Trust for the improvement of health services in Ravenshead and funds which will be released as part of developer contributions arising from the Local Plan housing allocations will greatly assist here. The Chief Executive of the Gedling Primary Care Trust will write to you separately about the PCT's plans for these health improvements.

You appear to criticise the Borough Council in saying that none of your village leisure services are provided directly by Gedling Borough Council, "as is the case in most of the rest of the Borough". Gedling Borough Council has long had a policy of offering to the Parish Councils the option of managing for themselves the recreation grounds and other leisure facilities in the parishes. When the Parish of Ravenshead was created and the area was transferred into the Gedling Borough, the Cornwater playing fields were transferred from Newark & Sherwood District Council to Gedling Borough Council. In accordance with this policy the Parish Council was given the option of either having the playing fields managed by the Borough Council or of managing them themselves. The Parish Council itself chose to manage the facilities directly and the Borough Council was happy to go along with this.

Since then, in 2000, the Borough Council agreed to the Parish Council's request that the Leisure Centre site be sold to the Parish Council. The sale price was to be only £20,000, notwithstanding the fact that the site was worth £60,000 - in effect this represented a further substantial grant from the Borough Council to the Parish Council. The Borough Council's Sports Development Officer has also worked closely with the Parish Council in order to develop sports activity in the Parish and to encourage the use of the leisure centre facilities. It is a pity that none of this support seems to receive any acknowledgment from the Parish Council.

I am afraid that I do not understand your comment that 'there is also a considerable risk that Gedling will be caught up in future restructuring which will bring the Borough into the Nottingham conurbation'. I am sure you are aware that the Minister of Communities and Local Government has been at pains recently to emphasise that the government has no plans for any restructuring of local government. There is no current expectation (and certainly not 'a considerable risk') that the Borough will be caught up in any kind of local government reorganisation which will see the Borough absorbed into the city.

Your comments with regard to local planning decisions and the local plan similarly misrepresent the truth behind the efforts made by the Borough Council to protect and preserve the villages and the green belt. The new local plan, in providing for

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development on urban and Brownfield sites at a density which is greater than previously, will see the minimum possible amount of the current green belt given over to development. This will mean that we will have a green belt which has a boundary which is safeguarded from development for the long term and protected from pressures from developers which would otherwise arise. The amount of land that is being removed for development from the current green belt will be no more than 1.4% of the total – hardly a 'sacrifice of the green belt'. 'Infill development' which you are objecting to is an inevitable by-product of the imperative to protect the green belt and is in truth in evidence in villages throughout the country – including in neighbouring districts.

I am particularly interested in your suggestion that the views of the 'vast majority' of Ravenshead people have been disregarded in the local plan process. Again, the truth is very different. The Borough Council has made a very substantial and sustained effort to consult residents and communities throughout the Borough repeatedly through the very long and difficult process of adopting the new local plan. Despite the very great effort which the Parish Council put into trying to whip up public opposition to the proposed development at Regina Crescent, the truth is that a substantial majority of the residents of Ravenshead have expressed no view whatsoever on the Local Plan proposals and they have certainly not expressed any opposition to them. Of those residents who did make representations, by no means all of them were in opposition to the proposals.

One can only wonder at the actual views of this large and silent majority, but the fact that they were not prepared to support the Parish Council in its objections may perhaps be because they realise that they themselves actually live on and enjoy the benefits of precisely the kind of development which the Parish Council wishes to prevent. As one long standing resident of Ravenshead pointed out to us in expressing support for the proposed development at Regina Crescent, it was not so many years ago that the whole of the central area of Ravenshead was undeveloped and unbuilt upon - back in the days when Ravenshead (or Fishpool as it then was) had no school, no leisure centre, no health centre, no community facilities, no shopping precinct and no mains drainage.

You ask me to advise on the viability of a move to Newark & Sherwood and to seek observations from the Gedling Cabinet. I will let you have these observations in due course, but I have to say that I have real doubts as to whether most of the fair minded residents of Ravenshead, given a true appreciation of the value and quality of the services provided in Ravenshead by Gedling Borough Council, would really be prepared to support a demand by the Parish Council that the village be transferred into the area of Newark & Sherwood District Council.

Yours sincerely,

P Murdock

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

cc Geoff Sheard, Ravenshead Newsletter