West Adderbury Residents Association Submission on Community Governance Review

The law requires parish council governance to be 'reflective of the identity and interests' of the community in the area and to be 'effective and convenient.'
Adderbury Parish Council is none of these things. It fails on all counts. The Community Governance Review now underway is not about splitting a village – the Council has already done that – it is about creating a separate civil administration to deliver the services the residents of West Adderbury need. We are currently at the mercy of an administration fixated on pursuing its agenda to the detriment of issues we consider far more pressing and important. When a majority systematically uses its power to deny a minority its rights, this becomes tyranny and is not democracy.

The failure to reflect identity and interests

The true measure of democracy is its inclusivity- how well it accommodates the legitimate aspirations of diverse and competing minorities. It is not just a numbers game where it is all right to impose the will of the majority whatever. Might is not right – to routinely exclude, neglect or ignore minority interests is intolerable and a form of discrimination. But that is precisely the fate suffered by residents in West Adderbury under Adderbury Parish Council (APC).
Benjamin Franklin once described democracy as two wolves and a lamb voting on what to have for lunch. West Adderbury is tired of feeling like a lamb to the wolves of East Adderbury and Twyford.

West Adderbury is historically and geographically a separate village from East Adderbury and Twyford. The sleepy and peaceful character of West Adderbury is in stark contrast to the bustling, suburban nature of the rest of the Parish. Many residents chose to live in West Adderbury because they value its distinctive and unique character. Many residents identify first and foremost with West Adderbury and want to keep our special identity. It is an essentially residential area with a rural character but only makes up 23% of the total parish population. It is this fundamental arithmetical fact which has effectively disenfranchised us and continues to do so. And yet West Adderbury has existed as an independent community for a thousand years and successfully ran its own parish council right up to 1972.

Because it forms a minority within APC, the interests and aspirations of its population have never been, and will never be, accommodated by a council dominated by a clique under the same chairperson for 20 years. APC's vision does not include West Adderbury beyond using it as somewhere to site new development or facilities it finds too noisy or otherwise unacceptable in their current location.

The failure to be effective and convenient

APC's long history of dysfunctional conduct makes a powerful case for change. In 2017 Cherwell District Council felt the need to appoint an independent management consultant to review APC practices. They found:
"a high level of animosity between a number of councillors. Mutual distrust between a group of members and the chair and her supporters. The way that these disagreements are articulated on both sides goes way beyond legitimate disagreements about policy or procedures and has descended at times into disruptive behaviour, allegations being made which question the integrity of individuals and an unwillingness to engage in debate or allow legitimate concerns to be raised." (Hoey Ainscough Report 3.8)

APC did not listen and has not learned to mend its ways. The poisonous atmosphere of council meetings persists as does the chair's totalitarian approach to running things, rudely and abruptly closing down debate on issues which do not further APC interests.

The issues of real concern to most people in West Adderbury are –

The dangerous growth of speeding traffic
The costly plans for a new sports and community project unrelated to local need
The threat of overdevelopment
The provision of adequate drainage to protect homes from flood risks.
The lack of a decent, dignified burial provision

We want full implementation of traffic calming measures within the major roads
in West Adderbury, including a 20mph zone. The installation of proper drainage to ensure against the flooding of West Adderbury homes and that our cemetery will not flood or be liable to pollute our water courses.

The initial response from APC to such issues is first to deny that there is a problem. If it will not go away then they kick it into the long grass. It is farmed out to a specially appointed ad hoc subcommittee to be endlessly

debated and reported on, only to be forgotten or ignored if the findings do not suit the APC agenda. This modus operandi is calculated to create the illusion of ongoing public consultation and community involvement but involves no commitment of any kind. Inconvenient recommendations can be dismissed on the ground that they are merely 'advisory'.

The Council's claims to have overwhelming public support for its policies are wholly misleading. It maintains its core support by a deliberate policy of divide and rule. Inevitably this has set communities against each other, destroyed trust and undermined community cohesion.

Time and again APC has proved itself to be secretive, mendacious and manipulative.
In 2017 it was forced to make a public apology for attempting to improperly influence a parish poll on the Neighbourhood Plan by campaigning for a Yes vote. Parish councils are not permitted to campaign in the 28 days before a referendum. APC broke the law but pleaded ignorance of the rule. This is curious given that the parish clerk was a Democratic and Scrutiny officer for Cherwell District Council and the Chair has been in position for 20 years.

APC misrepresented the result of another parish poll on whether to call in Oxford County Council to consult on traffic measures. It claimed the poll showed overwhelming public support for its policy against calling in the county council. In fact, the turnout was just 19.4% and the votes was 2 to 1 against - putting support for APC around 13% of the parish population - a less than ringing endorsement.
Even that was only achieved after APC contrived to insert a last-minute wrecking question on whether section 106 monies from its sports and community project should be diverted for traffic improvements. This ploy effectively turned the poll into a referendum on APC's pet project rather than the traffic problem it will exacerbate.

In 2017 a 200-signature petition from West Adderbury to the Parish Council on traffic dangers was unaccountably lost. A traffic planning subcommittee was set up but then dissolved because its raft of recommendations looked too expensive. It was subsumed into an Environment committee which continues to produce voluminous reports with very little to show on the ground. For the last two years APC has insisted it has £40,000 earmarked for traffic calming measures but nothing substantive has been done. Traffic calming is more than white painted gates and a few signs, it requires physical measures to force drivers to slow down within a 20mph speed zone.

APC will not spend on our priorities because it has its own - a hugely expensive sports and community project. For political reasons it persists in misrepresenting our views on the project. WARA has repeatedly stated that **we do not oppose the provision of new community sports facilities on the Milton Road site**. Our objection is based on the sheer scale of the scheme. What began as a modest community hall with 40 parking spaces has by stealth morphed into a major venue with bars, cafe, restaurant, meeting rooms, and parking for 140 cars. The scale of the £2M plus project bears no relation to local needs and certainly exceeds local resources. 90% of residents in West Adderbury say they are unlikely to use this facility. APC promised the public a detailed, fully costed business plan 2 years ago. It has yet to materialise. We fear being left with an expensive white elephant.

APC set up Working for Adderbury Community -WFAC - to find out what facilities the public wanted and generally involve the community in funding and planning for Milton Road but two key figures, including the Chairman of WFAC, suddenly resigned because APC rejected their recommendations and unilaterally redrew their pitch plan. The WFAC Chairman's letter of resignation is instructive. It highlighted 'breaches of the basic level of civil operation within the group which we had always agreed were: offering respect to others, work for the positive outcome of the mission statement, operate with integrity and be independent of political lobbying.'

It should be noted that WFAC membership is conditional on signing a mission statement committing the applicant to supporting APC's aims. How to contain opposition and maintain tight control are clearly a high priority. The Chair has in the past exercised her casting vote to ensure her own re-election.

The transparency of the relationship between WFAC and APC is not clear. Is WFAC a de facto subcommittee of APC.

There is also clear evidence that she sought to improperly influence a controversial planning application in West Adderbury in which the developer was offering the parish council a cash incentive of £100,000 to maintain the Friends Meeting House and crucially land linking Adderbury to the Milton Road project which could also be used to extend the adjacent burial ground. She breached the Code of Conduct by lobbying widely on his behalf and even offered to consider extending the residential settlement boundary to accommodate the application. Planning approval has since been granted – the money was not a condition.

This is how APC has destroyed community cohesion and lost the trust of residents in West Adderbury. APC bends the rules and is increasingly a law unto itself. Despite being warned in advance, it is currently in breach of

3 conditions imposed on the Milton Road development with regard to wildlife and drainage, breaches which expose West Adderbury's cemetery and homes to increased risk of flooding.

It is undeniable and documented fact that APC has both in the past and recently attempted to manipulate Planning Officers, Consultees in the planning process, Councillors and politicians to get what they want whatever the cost to their own integrity or that of others. The losers in all this have too often been the residents of West Adderbury. APC has form and we see no prospect of change without separation. The present governance is intolerable.

We consider APC to be in clear breach of at least 4 of the 7 Nolan Principles of Public Life.

Objectivity - holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias
Openness – holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing
Honesty – holders of public office should be truthful
Leadership – holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour.
They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

It is APC's calculated policy of divide and rule that has split the community. It has set Twyford and East Adderbury against West Adderbury. Appeals to build bridges rather than burn them have been have ignored. APC's leadership has developed a boundless sense of entitlement and intolerance. It has discriminated against and denigrated West Adderbury, resorting to social media to brand us 'selfish snobs', 'elitist and divisive' Derogatory and insulting comments have been posted by former councillors – one the worst offenders being the spouse of APC's chairperson. This has fuelled divisions within Adderbury and contributed to the breakdown in community relations.

APC's claim that we do not have a high street or a centre and are, therefore, not a community is nonsense. Adderbury is a series of ribbon developments two miles in length that does not lend itself to having a centre. West Adderbury existed before the creation of Adderbury and as part of the ecclesiastical parish including Milton, Barford St Michael and Barford St John. There are many examples of villages being categorised as satellite villages in the Cherwell Local Plan i.e. Blackthorn, Claydon, Clifton, Great Bourton, Hempton, Lower Heyford, Middle Aston, Milton, Mollington, South Newington, and Wardington. There are other villages that demonstrate similar characteristics to West Adderbury

Our own West Adderbury Parish Council will:

Seek broad agreement on policy issues
Practise open book accountancy where voters have a say in spending
Maintain high standards of conduct
Refuse to tolerate bullying behaviour
Set a limit to the chair's powers and term of office.

We have many intelligent, trustworthy and capable individuals willing to step up to provide the fair and effective governance we deserve. Men and women with a wealth of experience of local government who can guide and advise us in establishing a new council and make it happen. The clerk to Heyford Park Parish Council, Lorraine Watling is among those offering their services to help us establish an effective parish council.
The time for change is now. Justice delayed is justice denied. We believe this is the only way that trust and harmony can be restored. We have no hidden agenda. We simply want the right to deal with the issues that affect our part of the village and use the precept collected from West Adderbury to benefit West Adderbury residents.

The continued absence of fair, efficient or effective governance at the parish level subjects us to grave injustice. Our voice has been silenced. Our right to consideration and representation has been denied. We are simply asking for the opportunity to once again take responsibility for our own affairs and fulfil our potential as a community. East Adderbury and Twyford have a parish council which caters for their needs and interests. All West Adderbury wants is what the rest of the parish already has.

For all the reasons above we submit that only separation now can put an end to the irreconcilable differences poisoning our community – that only separation can restore community cohesion and, above all, secure for us the effective representation the law requires.

West Adderbury Residents Association

Adderbury
Parish Council

Response from Adderbury Parish Council on the Community Governance Review

Adderbury Parish Council (APC) is against this split of the village to form a new parish in the west. These are the reasons why Councillors believe a separate Parish would not be a good idea or benefit the community.

- The area of the west of Adderbury is not separate, it is part of the existing village of Adderbury. It does not have a clear identity nor any central focal point to delineate it as a village. There is a clear centre for the whole of Adderbury village as being the area around the Church and High Street and the Green. Despite WARA recalling the previous 2 parishes (prior to 1971) they still had shared facilities like the Church, schools and meeting places.

- There is no clear separate geographical identity for west Adderbury. Someone crossing the Sor Brook would not believe themselves to be in a separate village.

- The current Parish Council supports many village organisations, financially and practically, such as Morris Men and Woman with Day of Dance, Party in the Park, Photographic Society, Adderbury Library, Christopher Rawlins Primary School, Adderbury Park Football Club, Adderbury Institute and many more. Many Councillors also support village societies and attend events for village charities like FOCAL and FOSMA and WFAC. These are events, clubs and societies which spread across the whole community.

- There is no separate identifiable community of West Adderbury. There are no separate West Adderbury societies or groups and no separate community events have been held. The west of Adderbury is not socially or politically distinct from the rest of Adderbury in any way at all. Both East and West Adderbury do have a good community cohesion – it is a wonderful village for community events which are shared by all residents. It is untrue to claim as the petitioners do that the "residents of west Adderbury have no sense of belonging" or that APC "prevents West Adderbury from fulfilling its potential as a community". The residents of west Adderbury are already doing this as part of the community of Adderbury as a whole and the Parish Council is supporting them.

- The petitioners claim they speak for 250 west Adderbury residents who are its 'members'. However, by their own admission, there are 750 residents in the west of Adderbury so they will still be a minority view and cannot therefore be speaking from a majority position. Also this group has no evidence that it does speak even for 250 residents as there appears to be no constitution, no membership list and no public meetings have been held for consultation to assess what residents in west Adderbury might want. Therefore claims that west Adderbury residents 'do not share a vision of the future with APC' have no evidence behind them. In fact the APC's vision statement for all the community is clearly stated in the Adderbury Neighbourhood Plan and this received resounding support from residents at the Referendum, suggesting the majority of residents do support the APC's vision. Many of those residents are from west Adderbury and in fact the Neighbourhood Plan Chairman and the majority of the members of the steering group are residents of West Adderbury.

- The Parish Council has twelve Councillors who are from all parts of the village. They are all hard working volunteers, who represent the interests of all of Adderbury, irrespective of which particular part they live in. WARA has claimed the current PC is not representative of the population of west Adderbury. This is contradicted by the fact that the PC always has a good number of west Adderbury residents as councillors. At the last election in 2016, 8 out of 11 councillors were from west Adderbury and in the last two council terms

(from May 2018) the number has ranged from 7 to 4, which there currently are. Therefore the claims made by the petitioners that "APC does not allow west Adderbury residents a voice" or "to solve their own problems and meet their own needs" or west Adderbury residents "have no stake in deciding their own future" are simply not true. West Adderbury has always been very well represented on the APC.

- The current Parish Council has an excellent working relationship with Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, Thames Valley Police and many other organisations which support the Council's work on behalf of the whole community.

- The existing Parish Council is pro-active in working with residents to benefit the community and there are a number of successful on-going projects in the village, supported by many residents who are actively involved. These include traffic calming, Adderbury Lakes Local Nature Reserve, the Biodiversity village project, the Forest School project with Christopher Rawlins Primary School and the Milton Road community pavilion and sports pitches. All of these were initiated by the current Parish Council and create many benefits for the residents of the whole village.

- The Adderbury Neighbourhood Plan (ANP) was also initiated by the Parish Council and involved residents from all parts of the village working together to produce a Plan. The ANP includes policies specific to the west of Adderbury as well as those which apply to the whole community. As stated above the ANP team, including its Chairman were largely from west Adderbury.

- One of WARA's claims is that the PC has not progressed any traffic calming in Adderbury, especially none in west Adderbury. However the Parish Council is working with the County Highways Authority to: paint new road markings; investigate the closure of the western arm of the Oak Tree junction to reduce traffic speed into the village on Milton Road and potential chicanes for Milton Road and Berry Hill Road; provide 30mph repeater signs; and move some of the VAS signs. The PC has also purchased a fixed camera to record those who speed in the village and we use volunteers as part of the 'Adderbury Speedwatch' initiative, in conjunction with Thames Valley Police. The majority of these measures are in west Adderbury and many have already been instigated.

- The Parish Council provides support to local residents who live within the flood plain, which includes the sourcing of sandbags and checking on residents who are affected by adverse weather. Councillors are also recruiting volunteers to be 'Snow Wardens' for the village to clear footpaths in poor weather and the Council has established an efficient system for the refilling of grit bins in the winter. These measures include areas of west Adderbury.

- Adderbury Cemetery is managed by the Parish Council. WARA have circulated rumours to the contrary, but there is plenty of space for further burials and the Parish Council has managed this well. The Parish Clerk has put a statement on the PC website as the rumours were completely untrue.

- Parish Council meetings are well run and give all residents of the Parish the opportunity to address the Councillors regarding issues which affect them and the community. All residents who contact the Clerk, Chairman or any Councillor receive an answer and action is taken where possible. Residents are never ignored. The petitioners have suggested that this is not the case. However they fail to point out that any disruption at meetings in the past was due to their own actions. Some members of the group calling themselves WARA have engaged in a long campaign against the APC for a number of years. This has involved two applications for JRs,

complaints against councillors to the CDC Monitoring Officer and unfounded allegations to the PC's auditors. WARA still refer to such actions despite the fact that they have all been firmly dismissed by the authorities applied to at every level. This is clearly vexatious on WARA's part. They also claim the APC has not taken notice of the Hoey Ainscough Report but the APC agreed an 'action plan' soon after the Report and has followed the advice of the Report, including tightening up procedures at meetings and using Standing Orders properly and effectively.

- The Lucy Plackett Playing Field (LPF) was bequeathed to the 'youth and others of the Parish of Adderbury'. At that time there were two Parish Councils which then had to work together. The current Parish Council sees no benefit in returning to this sort of arrangement for its continued maintenance. Current Councillors spend a lot of time looking after the Lucy Plackett Playing Field, including undertaking minor works like cutting back bushes, watering newly planted trees, litter picking, inspecting the play area and zip wire. This may be a potential extra expense for both parishes and it may also be a cause of delays if agreement has to be achieved at every decision.

- The issue with the Lucy Plackett Playing Field and the sharing of one facility across two parishes also applies to other areas such as the Church, Methodist Hall, Adderbury Institute, Adderbury Cemetery, library, School and community events such as Day of Dance, Party in the Park, School and Church fete (held in the Lucy Plackett) and the Community Days. How would use of these facilities and the fundraising for these village events be affected? The PC does not believe there can be any benefit in such a case.

- There is potential for an increase in Council Tax for all residents of the Parish – the splitting of responsibilities will not automatically translate into an exact split of costs. Often it is better for costs to be shared across a larger number of residents. Other costs may also occur for instance the upkeep of the historic Friends Meeting House (FMH) and The Pound, both in the west of Adderbury. The FMH has to be maintained by the Parish and as a Grade 2* listed building, the work can be costly. In the last 5 years the APC has spent approximately £45.000. Would a smaller Parish of west Adderbury have enough funds to provide for such upkeep?

- The case for a new West Adderbury Parish Council is based mainly on the grand gestures of stopping the Milton Road project and implementing traffic calming measures, on which the Parish Council is currently working with OCC to achieve (see above and the statement on the PC website for more details). The petitioners promoting the CGR have said they would like to use the Milton Road site for community uses 'better suited to the residents of West Adderbury', but with no details. However, this project is for the whole of the community of Adderbury and the land has been provided for all of Adderbury to use for 'Sports pitches and a community facility' under clear legal S106 agreements. There has been considerable support for this facility in two Parish Polls and as a policy in the Adderbury Neighbourhood Plan, including from many residents in the west of Adderbury who want the land to be used to provide an exciting venue for village sport and for the whole community to use for a range of activities.

- In their justification for the CGR, there does not appear to be any consideration of the many other day-to-day tasks carried out by Councillors; meetings with residents, meetings with contractors, litter picking, checking play equipment, liaising with other bodies, arranging the installation/filling of grit bins, arranging repairs/replacement of street furniture, ensuring dog bins are emptied…plus many more. This lack of forethought could have a serious detrimental impact on residents of all areas of the Parish, not just in the west of Adderbury.

Adderbury
Parish Council

- There is no evidence that the proposers of a West Adderbury Parish Council have considered the costs of running a Parish Council, including staffing costs, or the many polices they would need for employing a Clerk and how services such as grass cutting, weed control, dog waste collection, litter collection, plus many more, would be accounted for and split between the two. This would all take time and effort from Councillors willing to undertake such matters.

- In their most recent submission to the Consultation Working Group the Petitioners have claimed:
  "The issues of real concern to most people in West Adderbury are –
  The dangerous growth of speeding traffic,
  The costly plans for a new sports and community project unrelated to local need,
  The threat of overdevelopment,
  The provision of adequate drainage to protect homes from flood risks,
  The lack of a decent, dignified burial provision".

  In answer to these suggestions the Parish Council has shown above that:
  APC is working with the relevant authorities and the community to deal with traffic issues.
  The plans for a new sports and community project are based on local need. CDC has provided both the land and funds towards this project through S106 legal agreements with developers. If there were no local need then such agreements would not be possible.

  The matter of potential 'overdevelopment' can only be dealt with through the Planning process and APC always engages with CDC when applications come forward.

  Adequate drainage is a matter for OCC and the APC have been working with OCC Highways in particular on this issue. Also APC has a Flood Risk Policy and procedure in place, as mentioned above, and has worked hard in the past to ensure residents' property is safeguarded against flooding.

  Finally, there is ample room in Adderbury's cemetery for "a decent, dignified burial" and it is both untrue and insensitive of WARA to have claimed otherwise.

- The proposed divide of the village would not be as straightforward and easy as the proposers are suggesting and the Parish Council believes there would be no benefit to the residents of the community. It is not clear that the proposers have the best interests of residents at heart. They merely appear to be focussed on two main projects and have wrongly criticised the Parish Council on other issues including Adderbury Cemetery. There appears nothing positive in their campaign which has been not only negative but spiteful and vicious. It is difficult to see how the petitioners believe such a campaign can advance their cause with residents. Nor does the Parish Council believe that, should a separate council be set up it could lead to harmony or "promote cohesion for the whole of Adderbury", as the petitioners have suggested.

The Parish Council believes that if a separate Parish Council for the west of the village is established, the whole community will be the poorer for its creation.

21 August 2020