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West Devon
Borough
Council

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E-mail address: Darryl.White@swdevon.gov.uk
Date:

Dear Councillor

WEST DEVON COUNCIL - TUESDAY, 20TH FEBRUARY, 2018

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and attach papers in connection with the following item(s).

Agenda No Item

11. **Community Governance Review -Okehampton (Pages 1 - 36)**

Yours sincerely

Darryl White
Senior Specialist – Democratic Services

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Report to: **Council**

Date: **20 February 2018**

Title: **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW – STAGE 5**

Portfolio Area: **Strategy & Commissioning**

Wards Affected: **Okehampton South and Okehampton North**

Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

Date next steps can be taken:
(e.g. referral on of recommendation or implementation of substantive decision) **Immediately following this meeting**

Author: **Darryl White (on behalf of the Political Structures Working Group)**

Contacts: Cllr.mcinnnes@westdevon.gov.uk and darryl.white@swdevon.gov.uk

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Council RESOLVES that, in light of the submissions received during Stages 2 and 4 of the Community Governance Review:

- 1. The status quo be maintained (i.e. the size of the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council is retained at 8 Parish Councillors and there be no adjustments made to the Okehampton Hamlets / Okehampton Town Parish Boundary); and**
- 2. The Review therefore be concluded with immediate effect.**

1. Executive summary

1.1 In accordance with the adopted terms of reference (as outlined at appendix A), the Community Governance Review on a proposal to

increase the size of the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council by two additional parish councillors is now at Stage 5 of the process;

- 1.2 In accordance with Stage 5, the Council is now required to consider the initial and additional submissions received during Stages 2 and 4 of the Review before deciding whether a set of draft proposals should be published and subjected to further public consultation.

2. Background

- 2.1 Members will recall that the Council considered a report on the Review at its last meeting on 5 December 2017 (Minute CM 47 refers);
- 2.2 Since the Review had prompted Okehampton Town Council to take the opportunity to request that consideration also be given to undertaking a review of the town boundaries, the Working Group had been reluctant to make any formal recommendations on the draft proposals received;
- 2.3 The Council supported this view and agreed to:
 - 1. Note the main points arising from the initial submissions;*
 - 2. Build in an additional consultation stage to the Review timetable to provide an opportunity for those who had made initial representations to produce definitive proposal(s) for potential changes to the Okehampton Town-Okehampton Hamlets Parish Boundary before Friday, 2 February 2018; and*
 - 3. Update the Terms of Reference for the Review accordingly.'*
- 2.4 As a result of this decision, the initial respondents were advised of the updated Terms of Reference and were invited to submit more detailed alternative proposals for consideration at this stage of the Review;
- 2.5 This latest Consultation phase closed on 2 February 2018, during which, a further five responses were received; three from Members of the public and one each from Okehampton Town and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Councils (these are attached at Appendix B);
- 2.6 In summary, as with the earlier responses received, this consultation phase has given no clear consensus on a proposed way forward. One member of the public supports the wider review of Town boundaries, one other is strongly against it and one is supportive of the increase in Parish Council size;
- 2.7 The Parish Council has provided detailed information to justify its submission for two additional Parish Councillors and has also responded to points that were raised in the initial Town Council response. Likewise, the Town Council has provided an equally detailed response outlining its

reasons for requesting boundary changes and providing its preferred choice of five alternative options put forward.

2.8 These replies were presented and considered by the Political Structures Working Group at its meeting on 13 February 2018.

3. Political Structures Working Group Deliberations

3.1 The Working Group meeting was attended by five of its six Members (Cllrs Baldwin, McInnes, Musgrave, Sampson and Sanders). Furthermore, Cllrs Ball, Leech and Yelland were also in attendance as local Ward Members (in a non-voting capacity). A fourth local Ward Member, Cllr Davies, was unable to attend the meeting, but had sent a statement for the Working Group to consider during its deliberations;

3.2 The meeting was supported by the Deputy Monitoring Officer; the Democratic Services Senior Specialist; and the Democratic Services Specialist;

3.3 Before considering the Review, the Chairman of the Working Group invited any declarations of interest and these were recorded as follows:-

- Cllr McInnes declared a Personal Interest by virtue of attending a meeting with the Chairman and Clerk of the Parish Council in December 2017;
- Cllr Ball declared a Personal Interest by virtue of attending a meeting with representatives from the Parish Council and Cllr Davies recently. Similarly, Cllr Ball confirmed that he had also spoken to a number of Town Council representatives on this matter; and
- Cllrs Leech and Yelland declared a Personal Interest by virtue of being members of Okehampton Town Council.

3.4 To structure its considerations, the Working Group divided its considerations into the three main options available to the Council:

Option 1: To increase the size of the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council by two additional Parish Councillors;

Option 2: To change the Okehampton Town/Okehampton Hamlets Parish boundary; and

Option 3: To retain the status quo.

Each of the Options were then considered in turn.

In Support of Option 1 the following key points were expressed:

- The proposals would futureproof the Parish Council in light of the extensive future development that was intended for Okehampton Hamlets;
- The Parish Council comprising of 8 members for over 100 years and, in that time, its electorate had doubled in size; and

- On those occasions when a Parish Council vacancy had recently arisen, there was significant interest in filling this position.

In Opposition to Option 1, the following points were made:-

- Some Members were not convinced that there was a proven need to increase the size of the Parish Council;
- A Parish Council size of 8 members was considered to be a good working number for a rural parish such as Okehampton Hamlets; and
- Some of the increased areas of workload referred to in the Parish Council submission could be undertaken by volunteers and were not the sole responsibility of a Parish Council.

It was then **PROPOSED, SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that: *'the Working Group is not minded to recommend an increase in the size of Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council at this time.'*

In support of Option 2, reference was made to:-

- an acknowledgement that, under the existing arrangements, those residing in the future development sites will live in the Hamlets (thereby paying a lower rate of precept) whilst frequently using the services and facilities within the town;
- there being a number of anomalies and discrepancies with the existing Hamlets/Town boundaries which are causing a number of problems for the Town Council; and
- the Town Council request to change the boundaries being triggered by the Council Motion to review the size of the Hamlets Parish Council.

In opposition to Option 2, the following points were made:

- There was currently no appetite from the Hamlets to review the boundaries;
- Having just recommended that the Hamlets did not increase its Parish Council size, it was felt to be counterproductive to then recommend any changes to the existing Hamlets/Town boundaries; and
- Some disappointment was expressed that the Town Council submission did not make any reference to partnership working with the Parish Council.

It was then **PROPOSED, SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that: *'the Working Group is not minded to recommend any adjustments to the existing Hamlets/Town boundaries at this time.'*

In light of these recommendations, the Working Group proceeded to consider **Option 3**. In its discussions, the Group recognised the importance of the Town and Parish Council working more closely together in partnership;

Whilst it was recognised that this Review had affected working relationships between the two councils, this was considered to be to the detriment of the electorate. As a consequence, the Working Group encouraged the local Ward Members to facilitate initiatives in an attempt to improve these working relationships.

Before a vote was invited on retaining the status quo, the Working Group was informed that there would not be the ability to request a further review in this area for at least another two years from the date of the decision. With this in mind, there was a hope amongst the Working Group that, within the next two years, the Town and Parish Council could build upon the joint work they are undertaking on a Joint Neighbourhood Development Plan. As part of this exercise, Members felt that there could be the opportunity over the next two years to develop a proposal for a Community Governance Review that was broadly acceptable to both councils. If this was the case, then a set of proposals could then be presented to the Borough Council for its approval to invoke a new Review.

It was then **PROPOSED, SECONDED** and when put to the vote declared **CARRIED** that:

- ‘1. The status quo be maintained; and*
- 2. The Review therefore be concluded with immediate effect.’*

4. Implications

Legal/Governance		<p>The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 requires the Council to ‘consult the local government electors for the area under review and any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the review and to take the representations that are received into account by judging them against the statutory criteria (as below):</p> <p>‘That Community governance within the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area and is effective and convenient.</p> <p>In respect of the timing of Community Governance Reviews, Section 24 of the Act states that:</p> <p>‘A principal council is under a duty to carry out a community governance review if it receives a valid community governance petition for the whole or part of the council’s area. However, the duty to conduct a review does not apply if:</p>
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		(a) the principal council has concluded a community governance review within the last two years which in its opinion covered the whole or a significant part of the area of the petition; or (b) the council is currently conducting a review of the whole, or a significant part of the area to which the petition relates
Financial		There are no additional financial implications directly related to this report
Risk		By retaining the status quo, there are no risk implications directly related to this report.
Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		There are no equality and diversity implications directly related to this report.
Safeguarding		There are no safeguarding implications directly related to this report.
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		There are no community safety or crime and disorder implications directly related to this report.
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		There are no health, safety and wellbeing implications directly related to this report.
Other implications		N/A

Supporting Information

Appendices:

- A. Community Governance Review – Terms of Reference; and
- B. Responses received during Stage 4 of the Review.

Background Papers:

- Cllr Davies' statement to the Political Structures Working Group meeting held on 13 February 2018;
- Council agenda and minutes arising from 5 December 2017 meeting;
- Responses received during Stage 2 of the Review; and
- DCLG Guidance on Community Governance Reviews.

West Devon Borough Council

Community Governance Review – Draft Revised Terms of Reference

At its meeting on 23 May 2017, West Devon Borough Council resolved to instigate a Community Governance Review. The Borough Council will be guided by the relevant legislation and guidance, in particular the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and Guidance on Community Governance Reviews (published jointly by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England).

What is a Community Governance Review?

A Community Governance Review provides the opportunity for 'principal councils' (borough councils and unitary councils) to review and make changes to community governance within their areas. Such a Review can be helpful in circumstances such as where there have been changes in population, or in reaction to specific or local new issues.

In so doing, a Community Governance Review offers an opportunity to put in place strong, clearly defined boundaries, tied to firm ground features and remove the many anomalous parish boundaries that exist in England.

Why is the Borough Council undertaking the Review?

In light of the Council decision made on 23 May 2017, the main purpose of this Review will be to consult on a proposal to increase the size of the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council by two additional parish councillors.

The government has emphasised that recommendations made in a Review ought to bring about '*improved community engagement, more cohesive communities, better local democracy and result in a more effective and convenient delivery of local services.*'

As the principal authority, West Devon Borough Council is responsible for undertaking any such Review within its electoral area. The body responsible for overseeing this process is the Full Council, who will be responsible for producing draft and final recommendations. The Council will approve the final recommendations before a Community Governance Order is made.

How will the Borough Council conduct consultations during this Review?

Before making any recommendations or publishing final proposals, the Borough Council will take full account of the views of local residents. The Borough Council will comply with the statutory consultative requirements by:-

- Consulting local government electors for the area under review;
- Consulting any other person or body (including a local authority) which appears to the Borough Council to have an interest in the review;
- Notifying and consulting Devon County Council; and
- Taking into account any representations received in connection with the review.

Information relating to the review will be available on the Council website (www.westdevon.gov.uk) and key documents will be available on request from the Borough Council offices at: Kilworthy Park, Drake Road, Tavistock PL19 OBZ.

The Borough Council will publish its recommendations as soon as practicable and will take such steps as it considers sufficient to ensure that persons who may be interested in the review are informed of the recommendations and the reasons behind them. The Borough Council will notify each consultee and any other persons or bodies who have made written representations of the outcome of the review.

What will be the timetable for this Review?

It is a statutory requirement whereby a review must be concluded within a twelve month period from the day on which it commences. A review starts when the Borough Council publishes its Terms of Reference and concludes when the Borough Council publishes its final recommendations.

Outlined below is the proposed timetable for the review:-

Stage 1	Publication of the Terms of Reference for the Review	Monday, 31 July 2017
Stage 2	Introductory Stage: Submissions are invited. The Borough Council invites proposals from stakeholders on future arrangements in accordance with the Terms of Reference.	Monday, 31 July 2017 – Tuesday, 21 November 2017
Stage 3	Consideration of Initial Submissions: Draft proposals to be considered by the Council's Political Structures Working Group before recommendations are made to the Council meeting on 5 December 2017.	Wednesday, 22 November – Tuesday, 5 December 2017

Stage 4	Additional Consultation Stage In light of the submissions received during Stage 2 of the process, the Borough Council invites definitive proposals for potential changes to the Okehampton Town-Okehampton Hamlets Parish boundary.	Thursday, 7 December 2017 – Friday, 2 February 2018
Stage 5	Further Consideration of Initial Submissions and Any Additional Submissions Received During Stage 4 Draft proposals to be considered by the Council's Political Structures Working Group before recommendations are made to the Council meeting on 20 February 2018.	Monday, 5 February – Tuesday, 20 February 2018
Stage 6	Consultation on Published Draft Proposals: In publishing the draft proposals, the Borough Council will notify stakeholders and invite further comments and/or recommendations.	Monday, 26 February 2017 – Friday, 29 June 2018
Stage 7	Final Recommendations Consideration of consultation responses and production of final recommendations to be presented to the Political Structures Working Group in the first instance and on to a Council meeting in July 2018 (<i>date to be confirmed</i>).	Monday, 2 July – Council Meeting in July 2018 (<i>date to be confirmed</i>)
Stage 8	Implementation Final recommendations are then published and the Council resolves (if appropriate) to make a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order. For administrative and financial purposes, the Order should take effect on 1 September 2018. Electoral arrangements for an existing town and/or parish council will come into force at the first elections to the town and/or parish council following (any) Reorganisation Order, which will be May 2019.	Council Meeting in July 2018 (<i>date to be confirmed</i>) 1 September 2018 May 2019

The review will be formally completed when the Council adopts and publishes the Reorganisation of Community Governance Order and requests that the Electoral Commission approve any consequential changes.

How to contact us

Should you wish to submit a written representation regarding this review, please address this to:

Community Governance Review
Member Services
West Devon Borough Council
Kilworthy Park
Tavistock
PL19 0BZ

Alternatively, your submission may be emailed to:
member.services@swdevon.gov.uk

Date of publication

Monday, 31 July 2017 (updated version published 7 December 2017)

RESPONSES RECEIVED TO THE SECOND PUBLIC CONSULTATION

From Mr Rush:

Sirs,

I refer to the Governance Review requested recently by Okehampton Hamlets PC.

<https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/governancereview>

This process (additional two councillors for the Hamlets) should not go ahead without a complete and holistic review of Okehampton Town boundaries and numbers of Councillors for both Town and Hamlet authorities.

The relationship of numbers of Councillors to numbers of residents and facilities/infrastructure indicates that the sensible course would be quite the reverse of the request.

If there is to be any increase in Councillor numbers (or more logically adjustments to Town boundaries), it should reflect the reality of extensive urban development tacked onto Okehampton Town already - and further proposed for the next five years.

An increase of 1500 homes attached to the Town, but of course partially encroaching into the Hamlets, is an opportunity to realistically set new and overdue Town boundaries wholly within the Hamlets geographical area.

This would resolve the anomalous and wholly inequitable disparity in Council Tax charges currently being made.

I look forward to hearing your observations,

Bob Rush

From Mr Heard:

Dear Anna,

I am writing to express my dismay at the Okehampton Town Councils attempted hijack of the Community Governance Review from the Hamlets Parish Council to increase the number of Councillors, by trying to include an amalgamation or moving the parish boundary with the Okehampton Hamlets PC against the Hamlets wishes.

The two parishes are distinctly different with the Hamlets being a rural parish managed very efficiently by the current Councillors, who are from diverse backgrounds and abide in all parts of the Parish. Most are successful local business owners who have an intimate knowledge of the parish they live in, whether it be management of the vast Okehampton Common or running a successful residents group within one of the new housing development areas.

The assets falling within the Hamlets Parish that make it distinctly different from the Town Parish include:

Meldon Reservoir

Okehampton Castle

Meldon Village Hall

Okehampton Army Camp

Meldon Quarry

Okehampton Common (3000 acres)

Meldon Viaduct

Okehampton Golf Course

Abbeyford Woods (part of)

Meldon Woods

Fatherford Viaduct

There are many very popular footpaths running through the Hamlets including:

The Granite Way Cycle Route

The West Devon Way

The Tarka Trail

The Two Castles Trail

It can easily be argued many visitors attracted to the above, then spend money in the town.

If there were to be a boundary change no doubt the Town council will want to cherry pick the recent housing development areas and the Industrial estates that lie within the Hamlets Parish, this would appear to be asset grabbing parts of the Hamlets in order to increase their own precept.

The Town Council have stated the difference in council tax in the two parishes as one of their main reasons for change, as you know all neighbouring parishes have different council tax ratings.

The Town Council also state their assets, Simmons park, the Town hall and public toilets, are used by members of the hamlets, this again is a ridiculous argument, as these premises are open to people from all parishes, Meldon woods owned and run by the Hamlets PC is used by Town residents as well as others from other parishes.

The Hamlets PC are happy to work with the Town Council, they recently paid for one of the new children's' rides in Simmons Park and have occasional joint meetings with them, however just because there have been more housing developments in the Hamlets, does not mean the Hamlets PC is incapable of maintaining their high standard of running their own PC or need to be taken over by their wealthier neighbours.

This Governance review is about increasing the number of Councillors to reflect the rapidly growing population within the Parish and should not be extended to further the Town council's avarice.

Yours faithfully

Philip Heard

From Mr Wise:

DATE 12TH JANUARY 2018

M^S G.G. WISE

Personal Data Redacted

GOVERNANCE REVIEW

DEAR SIR I would support THE REQUEST FROM THE OKEHAMPTON HAMLETS PARISH COUNCIL TO INCREASE THERE NUMBERS FROM 8 TO 10 COUNCILLORS TO HELP WITH THERE EVER EXPANDING WORK LOAD.

YOURS SINCERLY.

Signature Redacted

From Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council:

Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council's submission to West Devon Borough Council and Political Structures Working Group

We welcome the opportunity to expand further on our initial submission to the Council and Political Structures Working Group. (Please see our original submission Appendix 4).

Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council has an historic boundary of over 120 years encircling the Town of Okehampton and covering a diverse geographical area of over fifteen square miles. Its outer boundary is adjacent to a number of neighbouring Parish Councils and Dartmoor National Park Authority, with whom we have an excellent working relationship. It has been the location of many industrial, agricultural, military and commercial activities. It also includes many historical, industrial and cultural sites, such as Okehampton Castle; Okehampton Camp; Meldon, Granulite and Aggetts Quarries. More recently the Manor and Ashbury hotels and multiple Business Parks to the East of Okehampton have attracted workers from all around West Devon and beyond. Many visitor and leisure attractions also located within the Hamlets, such as Okehampton Golf Club; Abbeyford Woods; Meldon Reservoir; Okehampton Common, (the highest place in Southern England). The area is criss-crossed with many Public Rights of Way including the Two Castles Trail and the Tarka Trail and the Granite Way cycle route. As such the character of the landscape has changed and developments next to Okehampton Town have included new housing and a new primary school to serve the needs of those locally and further afield. Important wireless communications systems are located within the Hamlets. The major transport links of the A30 and the former Southern Railway run through the parish (plans are advanced to reopen the later with a station being built near Stockley to serve Okehampton and beyond), many buses serve the area, with many bus stops being located within the Hamlets. As such the Hamlets are frequented by both Town Council and Hamlets Parish residents as well as those who live outside these boundaries.

The Parish Council itself is very active with all members playing a part; the Members represent the rural character of the Parish, together with successful business and professional Individuals. It meets at least once a month to conduct its business. Lately this has become more frequent and it was recognised that an increase in membership would enable it to function more efficiently with a shared workload and committee structure to ensure service delivery and representation within the community. It is also recognised that there will be increasing responsibilities for the Parish Council. (See Appendix 1). Recently there were four applicants for one casual vacancy, reflecting the keen and strong support it has of the local population.

With new residents moving into the Hamlets the Parish Council has recognised the need to support these and is developing a Parish Development Plan to support this. (See Appendix 2). The works proposed will also cover the wider population and visitors to West Devon as well as residents within the Hamlets boundary. Some of these will be delivered by working with partners who may share the same vision.

The Parish Council believes that it has an important role to play as custodians of the countryside. Meldon Woods which was donated to the Parish Council by the Major Ryan and was lightly managed by the National Park; it now needs closer management for future generations to enjoy. It's increasing use and recent weather conditions have seen erosion of paths and damage to fences and trees that require attention. Soon the Old Town Park will be transferred to the Parish Council by West Devon Borough Council and will need some remedial works and improvements. The many well used Public Rights of Way and Highways within the Hamlets are monitored by Council Members. We fully support the Okehampton Show, which is a major agricultural show in this part of Devon,

The Parish Council does not believe that the residents and visitors to the area will be at any advantage with a merger of the Parish Council and the Town Council. The two councils are of different character with different demands on service delivery. It is also opposed to any changes to the current boundaries. It does however; recognise that there are some minor anomalies with houses and other properties in the same roads being divided between the two councils and if the owners were to agree these could be transferred to form sensible boundaries close to the historic ones. Variations in Council Tax Precepts are a national phenomena and not a local one. (See Appendix 3 and Okehampton Town Council original submission).

The Parish Council remains committed to working with ALL partners and neighbouring councils to assist in service delivery and are already working with Okehampton Town Council with a Joint Neighbourhood Development Plan and have agreed to assist Belstone Parish Council with woodland management. It has supported and will continue to support many local organisations in the Okehampton area which has also been of benefit of people from further afield.

Joint guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in 2010 provides information on community governance reviews and the factors influencing size and membership of parish councils. On size, the guidance says:

'154 In practice, there is a wide variation of council size between parish councils. That variation appears to be influenced by population. Research by the Aston Business School Parish and Town Councils in England (HMSO, 1992), found that the typical parish council representing less than 500 people had between 5 and 8 councillors; those between 501 and 2,500 had 6 to 12 councillors; and those between 2,501 and 10,000 had 9 to 16 councillors.

155. The LBGE has no reason to believe that this pattern of council size to population has altered significantly since the research was conducted. Although not an exact match, it broadly reflects the council size range set out in the National Association of Local Councils Circular 1126...'

Okehampton Hamlets parish is significantly larger geographically than the average Town or Parish. It is also not made up of one settlement, it has 5 distinct areas or 'Hamlets'. This adds to the challenges of councillors building relationships with the

electorate in order to serve them effectively. Travelling from one side of the parish to the other is not a 10 minute and walk, more likely a 30 minute drive on a good day.

The table below shows statistics from other local parishes (random sample) and West Devon as a whole. (Electoral roll data as at 31/12/2017) –

Council name	Number of councillors	Electorate	Ratio of electorate per councillor
West Devon in total	384	43752	113.9
Belstone	7	207	29.5
Bridestowe	7	507	72
Sticklepath	7	352	50
Northlew	9	621	69
Drewsteignton	9	689	76.5
North Tawton	12	1558	130
OHPC currently	8	1162	145
Proposal using current electorate	10	1162	116
Proposal using forecast est of electorate	10	2000/2500	200/250

These statistics show the request for 2 additional councillors to be fully justified. The request is intended to 'future proof' effective working within the council for the next 10 years and at no additional cost to the ratepayers.

Appendix 1

Reasons for extra councillors

Share an ever increasing workload as a result of

- Planning Applications
- Highways monitoring
- PROW monitoring
- Snow Wardens
- Meldon Woods Management
- Old Town Park transfer and management
- Open Space Wardens
- Increase in residents and visitors
- Partnership working
- Appointments to external bodies
- Planned increase in street furniture
- Improvements in communications
- Distribution of newsletters
- Equipment monitoring
- Parish Development Plan
- Restructure to introduce a committee structure
- Keeping up to date with changing legislation and responsibilities
- Co-ordinating volunteers
- Develop closer working relationships with neighbouring councils
- Improve representation on outside bodies
- Working with an increasing population within the fifteen square miles and the five main settlements of Brightley, Chichacott , Meldon, Southcott, Stockley as well as the new development near Stockley.
- Working with existing and new businesses relocating to the Hamlets.

Appendix 2

Summary of Objectives in the OHPC Draft Parish Development Plan

- Improve information, communications (website, Facebook page and newsletters) and increase numbers of notice boards with additional information.
- Increase number of bus stop shelters; (currently only one of six has one).
- Develop community facilities to the East of Okehampton Town.
- Expand and enhance the Snow Warden Scheme.
- Complete Meldon Woods Management Plan and complete remedial works. This will include tree and coppice management; footpath maintenance; improved signage; car park repairs; fence repairs; planting and ground clearance; seats and picnic provisions. Work with National Park, ORIC StOC others to improve fauna and flora (e.g. further provision of door mouse, bat & bird boxes).
- Continue to support Meldon Woods Wildlife Day with Dartmoor National Park Authority and look for other opportunities to promote the Woods as a public amenity; (e.g. May Bluebell Walks).
- Complete Old Town Park Management Plan on transfer from WDBC including path repairs and bench & picnic provision.
- Improve Highways monitoring and communications with Devon Highways
- Monitor PROW's and liaise with DCC.
- Work with neighbouring Parish Councils on areas of mutual benefit; (e.g. assisting Belstone PC with a Wood Management Plan and Joint Neighbourhood Development Plan with OTC)
- Restructure the Council with the introduction of a Committee Structure, (e.g. Planning and Open Space).
- Work closely with OTC to ensure effective and efficient provisions of services near and in the Town; (e.g. shared costs on toilet provision).
- Promote Discretionary Grant scheme to the benefit of residents.
- Work with businesses to encourage sustainability.
- Work with others and provide if necessary, waste receptacles in problem areas.
- Work with OTC and others to promote "*Okehampton in Bloom*".
- Continue to work with partner organisations (e.g. Okerail).
- Continue to work with and promote the Okehampton Show, which is one of the premier agricultural shows in Devon.
- Promote the historic sites within the Hamlets and surrounding areas, (e.g. Okehampton Castle, mining and milling). Work with partners to promote tourism (e.g. Tourism Office, Town Council).
- Seek grants to support our work in the open spaces.

Appendix 3

Response to OTC presentation submission on Community Governance Review

Slides 3 & 4. Owing to growth in population the 2011 census figures are not up to date.

Slide 5. The Parish Council equally pays and supports open spaces, local community groups, Chamber of Commerce and various festivals and events. The Town Council is not responsible for provision of all the services mentioned.

Slide 7. The facilities described cover an area much greater than the combined land mass of the Town and Hamlets councils. Most personal banking is carried out on line, hence banks are closing nationally.

Slide 8. Any increase in population within 15 miles of Okehampton Town will also have an increase in the use of the Town's facilities, only a few of which are provided by the Town Council. (Charter Hall, Town Hall and Simmons Park). The Town Council receives no financial assistance from anyone outside its boundaries, no matter where they reside. Most facilities are provided by other parties, i.e. Medical facilities, Library, Okement Centre, schools, Museum, supermarkets and shops. Many of the new population utilise online shopping or facilities in Exeter as their preferred choice, often combined with a daily car commute; (e.g. quicker to drive to Sainsbury in Exeter than to walk to Waitrose from Meldon Fields). Similarly many parents in the new development currently do not send their primary age children to Okehampton Primary School.

Slide 9. The figure quoted for residents per councillor is incorrect and inappropriate when comparing a town and parish council. The responsibilities and topography are vastly different and will vary largely between all parish councils and town councils larger than Okehampton Town Council. The responsibilities of Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council are under reported; (see other responses to the consultation). A primary school is due to open soon within the Hamlets and building works are about to commence. Few parishes will ever have banks and most personal banking is carried out online. The Hamlets have the highest number of employed workers, working within their boundaries, with more facilities being constructed or planned. The Parish Council is run efficiently and effectively, keeping overheads down and only employing staff to fulfil necessary works. This will include contractors and some volunteers. The listed provisions are not provided by the Town Council and would not be found in other neighbouring parishes. Okehampton Town is only one place that the residents around Okehampton have a choice of using.

Slide 10 (& 7). Show the expected difference between a council that has a high cost base and employ proportionally more workers (Town Council) and a Parish Council. The former could look at reducing their cost base to meet a lower income. It is the third highest precept in West Devon; the hamlets the sixteenth (of fifty five).

Slides 11,12 & 13. Anomalies in precept exist throughout the country. This is inevitable with the volume of developments nationally. The 200% figure quoted is

misleading as this refers only to the Parish precept element of the total council tax payable. The current difference in total Council Tax for a Band D property is not 200%, but 3.67%.

Appendix 4

The Parish Council currently has 8 members and we wish to increase the number to 10. Our electorate as at 1st March 2017 is 1076 and looking at the guidelines for number of members for the size of electorate (501 – 2500 electors between 6 and 12 members); we feel it is reasonable to request an increase from 8 to 10 members. I have outlined our reasons for this request as follows –

- The Parish Council needs to increase its numbers to allow the workload to be spread over a larger base and to ensure that councillors have the time to involve themselves in the detail of issues, rather than merely carrying out an overview role. The workload of the members has increased significantly over the recent few years, together with the workload of the Parish Clerk. The Clerks working hours have recently been increased to cover the increasing demands made on the Council.
- Records show that for over 100 years the number of members has remained the same at 8 whereas the electorate in the Parish has increased from under 500 to its current figure of over 1000 in the same period. An estimated 50 further new homes will be occupied in the parish before the end of 2017. ie a further increase of electorate of say 100.
- Further housing development is planned to take place in the Parish over the next 10 years and the electorate will increase further during this period by at least a further 1000 taking the total electorate to over 2000.
- This request is made now to cover our immediate shortfall in member resource together with the further increase in electorate over the next 10 years.
- The increasing number of consultations that we are required to distil for the parishioners, and respond to. These documents are regularly lengthy, all need to be read to assess whether it is relevant to our parish, and then disseminated to the members and responded to.
- Being a very large geographical parish covering over 15 square miles with five main settlement areas, having more members living amongst the communities helps the Councillors to best represent local opinions and feelings.

The council is confident these additional positions on the Council would be easily filled, the few vacancies the Council has had over the last 20 years have always been filled quickly and there is significant interest in the one vacancy that the Council is currently looking to fill.

This request is being made not only to cover the current resource shortfall but includes planning for the needs of the Council in the future.



Okehampton Town Council

**OKEHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW CONSULTATION**

**Review of Parish Boundary Between
Okehampton Town Council and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council
January 2018**

Contents:

Page 2	Introduction and Background
	Community Governance Review for Two Additional Members – Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council
Page 3	Boundary Review Request
Page 5	Boundary Review Options
Page 6	Conclusion and Recommendation
Page 8	Appendix A Parish Boundary Map
Page 9	Appendix B Parish and JLP Development Boundary Map
	Appendix C Precept Disparity Maps
Page 10	i Fox Close and Sterlings Way
Page 11	ii Baldwin Drive
Page 12	iii Vixen Tor Close
Page 13	iv New Primary School
Page 14	Appendix D Existing Parish Boundary, JLP Development Boundary and Options Map
Page 15	Appendix E Preferred Option Map, also showing the Existing Parish and JLP Development Boundary

Okehampton Town Council (OTC)
Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council (OHPC)

Introduction and Background

Okehampton is a rural market town situated in West Devon just off the main A30, not far from the cities of Exeter and Plymouth.

The map at Appendix A shows the existing boundaries between Okehampton Town Council (OTC) and Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council (OHPC). It is noticeable that OTC is completely surrounded by OHPC.

A Community Governance Review initiated by OHPC for two additional members, increasing their Councillors from 8 to 10, is considered by OTC to be an opportunity to review the wider local council governance structure of the greater Okehampton area and the feasibility of change to the joining parish boundary line.

OHPC Community Governance Review for Two Additional Members

Although geographically larger, OHPC being rural and consisting mainly of hamlets and farms, according to data supplied by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) in September 2017 has 1187 residents. OTC, which is the urban centre of the wider Okehampton area, consists mainly of residential and business areas, has a population of 5802 residents.

The following table shows the existing and proposed number of residents per Member for both parishes.

Parish	No of Residents	Existing No of Members	Existing No of Residents per Member	Proposed No of Members	Proposed No of Residents per Member
OHPC	1130	8	141	10	113
OTC	5597	14	400	14 (No change)	400 (No change)

It is suggested that the disparity in relevant numbers and comparative responsibilities should be addressed during any Governance Review.

OTC understands that OHPC have requested these additional two members to enable work such as that of Snow and Road Wardens to be undertaken. This type of work can be carried out by volunteers from within the community rather than Members. Snow Wardens have a very limited role in that their services are rarely required due to the warming climate, and in a cold year would normally only be required to be active for a few weeks. Therefore additional Member/s to take up this role are not necessary and OTC would not seek to increase its number of Member for such a minor addition to responsibilities.

In November 2017 OTC initiated a meeting with OHPC, facilitated by WDBC, to put forward some options for a wider review of the greater Okehampton area. At the meeting it was clearly stated by OHPC that they were not willing to take part in such a discussion and had made the following resolution at meeting on 7th November 2017, just prior to the joint meeting.

'This council is pleased that West Devon Borough Council has commenced a Community Governance Review to primarily consider increasing the membership of the Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council from eight to ten Members. This increase in membership will allow the council to meet its Statutory and community obligations more effectively. This council will not accept any mergers or changes to existing boundaries with any of our neighbouring Parish or Town Councils in order to reduce the size of this council's electoral area. However, the council would be prepared to consider any increase of electoral size should any of our neighbouring Parish or Town Councils wish to reduce or

relinquish their responsibilities. This council will also welcome an early outcome from the review to facilitate the election or co-option of further members. This council will continue to foster formal and informal working collaborations with its neighbouring councils to ensure effective deliverance of services to the communities of Okehampton and surrounding areas.'

A request for a pause in the consultation process was submitted by OTC during Stage 2 of the consultation to allow for a wider review and proposals for potential changes to the boundary between the two parishes to be submitted for consideration. This was granted at a WDBC meeting on 5th December 2017 and an additional consultation stage (Stage 4) was added, allowing the submission of additional proposals. This stage of the process runs from 7th December 2017 to 2nd February 2018.

OHPC/OTC Boundary Review Request

OTC has taken a common sense approach to an issue where the boundary simply hasn't kept pace with development in the local area. We believe that the current boundary is confusing; it doesn't promote effective local governance, and it splits the community. OTC is proposing that the unification of the whole of the Okehampton urban area would clear up a boundary that no longer reflects the shape of the local community.

Precept requests from the two Councils are dissimilar, the difference amounting to £65.43 in the 2017/18 financial year, as highlighted in the table, OTC residents paying almost two thirds more than residents in OHPC:

Parish	2017/18 Precept for a Band D Property
OHPC	£ 36.51
OTC	£ 101.94

It is recognised that OHPC have less responsibilities in the sense that they have few assets, they have no public toilets, municipal buildings or car parks to maintain, no public formal gardens, parks or play areas to look after and only one part-time member of staff who works from home.

The tax bases for both Councils have increased since December 2016, figures provided by WDBC on 20th December 2017 for 2018/19 precept requests:

- OHPC by 36.78
- OTC by 30.35

The increase in households shows that growth within the Hamlets is rising more rapidly than within the town boundary, gradually urbanising the more rural parish. A further increase of 750 new properties in the Hamlets, abutting the town boundary line is proposed within the 'Plymouth and West Devon Joint Local Plan' (JLP). The JLP expands Okehampton's development boundary most extensively to the east, out of the urban town area into the rural area of the hamlets, see map at Appendix B which depicts both the parish and JLP boundary between the two parishes.

The urban development that has been carried out in the last ten years, 620 houses, and proposed for the next five years, 775 houses, within the JLP development boundary (see

¹ <https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/jointlocalplan>

attached drawings) is completely contiguous with the Town itself, and there is no longer a discernible boundary separation.

A large majority of these additional residents will, in the present arrangement, live in the Hamlets, paying a much lower rate of precept, while accessing and using the facilities within and paid for by the town residents. Extending the boundary of the town would allow the cost of facilities located within the town to be spread across more residents, making the ongoing running of them and local services more feasible and cost effective, whilst allowing the rural parish of the Hamlets to continue to look after the rural areas surrounding the town. It would also be fairer and more equitable for all concerned.

Residents of the greater Okehampton area all use the facilities and infrastructure of the town. A use which will increase, as the residential areas grow. The majority of these new residential housing estates being outside of the present town boundary. A fairer spread of costs throughout the urban residential areas, present and future, would ensure the vibrancy of the town, its facilities and infrastructure for years to come.

The Local Government Boundary Commission document ²'Guidance on Community Governance Reviews' makes it clear that principal councils can, and should, review changes to boundaries when development leads to people being in different parishes to their neighbours. In particular the document states:

*Section 1, 8 b): making and implementing decisions on community governance (Chapter 3): the 2007 Act places a duty on principal authorities to have regard to the need to secure that any **community governance for the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the local community in that area**, and that it is effective and convenient; relevant considerations which influence judgements against these **two principal criteria include the impact on community cohesion, and the size, population and boundaries** of the proposed area.*

*Section 2, 12: 'Community governance reviews provide the opportunity for principal councils to review and make changes to community governance within their areas. **It can be helpful to undertake community governance reviews in circumstances such as where there have been changes in population**, or in reaction to specific or local new issues. The Government has made clear in the 2006 white paper and in the 2007 Act its commitment to parish councils. It recognises the role such councils can play in terms of community empowerment at the local level. The 2007 Act provisions are intended to improve the development and coordination of support for citizens and community groups so that they can make the best use of empowerment opportunities.'*

*Section 2, 15: 'In many cases making changes to the boundaries of existing parishes, rather than creating an entirely new parish, will be sufficient to ensure that community governance arrangements to continue to reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. For example, **over time communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across the boundaries resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours. In such circumstances, the council should consider undertaking a community governance review**, the terms of reference of which should include consideration of the boundaries of existing parishes.'*

Section 2, 23: 'Local people may have already expressed views about what form of community governance they would like for their area, and principal councils should tailor

² Guidance on Community Governance Reviews

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf

*their terms of reference to reflect those views on a range of local issues. Ultimately, the **recommendations made in a community governance review ought to bring about improved community engagement, better local democracy and result in more effective and convenient delivery of local services.***

Disparity in precept requests is of utmost concern to OTC. The existing parish boundary line runs directly through urban areas and streets, meaning that neighbours who live side by side on the same street are sited in different parishes and paying (in 2017/18) a difference in precept of £65.43, or around 64%. Some examples of particular areas can be seen in Appendix C:

- Appendix C i An Okehampton Town resident in Fox Close is paying an additional £65.43 towards local amenities, compared to a neighbour in Sterlings Way
- Appendix C ii An Okehampton Town Resident in Baldwin Drive is providing an extra £65.43 towards local amenities, compared to his direct neighbour
- Appendix C iii An Okehampton Town Resident in Vixen Tor Close is providing an extra £65.43 towards local amenities, compared to his neighbour in the same semi-detached property
- Appendix C iv A new primary school is in the process of being built to the east of the town. The existing town/hamlets parish boundary will run straight through the school premises as shown by the approximate location of the school in this appendix.

WDBC have agreed to consider any proposals submitted for changes to the boundary between OHPC and OTC within the Community Governance Review initiated by OHPC for two new Members.

Unfortunately the timescale of the consultation, spanning the Christmas and New Year holidays, has not provided sufficient time for OTC to undertake a survey encompassing the whole area. However unofficial data collated by OTC shows that many residents, particularly those living along the boundary between the two parishes do not know which area they reside in, many of them believing that they live in the town of Okehampton and contribute to the cost of running facilities located in the town, and the responsibility of OTC. OTC would be happy to conduct an official survey of residents if necessary and warranted.

Boundary Review Options

OTC has considered a number of options, 1 to 5, for amendment to the boundary between the two parishes which are mainly based on the JLP Development Boundary for Okehampton, extending the boundary to the east. A map, Appendix D, shows the existing parish boundary, the JLP development boundary and the options considered by OTC.

- Option 1 Follows the JLP Development Boundary line to the east of the town, making no other changes to the rest of the existing parish boundary.
- Option 2 Extends the OTC parish boundary to the east and south using A30 duel carriageway as a natural boundary line to the south, linking up to the JLP Boundary Line at the east end of the town.
- Option 3 Extends the OTC parish boundary to the east and south using the railway as a natural boundary line and the Belstone Parish Council boundary to the south east, linking up to the JLP Boundary Line at the east end of the town

Option 1 encompasses all of the JLP Development Boundary which extends outside of the existing town parish boundary, futureproofing the area from further precept disparity for at least the next sixteen years until 2034. Options 2 and 3 extend beyond the JLP Development Boundary extending this period well beyond 2034.

³ Section 3, 84: *'In many cases a boundary change between existing parishes, or parishes and unparished areas, rather than the creation of an entirely new parish, will be sufficient to ensure that parish arrangements reflect local identities and facilitate effective and convenient local government. **For example, over time, communities may expand with new housing developments. This can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming anomalous as new houses are built across them resulting in people being in different parishes from their neighbours.**'*

Section 3, 85: *'**A review of parish boundaries is an opportunity to put in place strong boundaries, tied to firm ground detail, and remove anomalous parish boundaries.** Since the new boundaries are likely to be used to provide the building blocks for district ward, London borough ward, county division and parliamentary constituency boundaries in future reviews for such councils, it is important that principal councils seek to address parish boundary issues at regular intervals.'*

Option 4 A smaller area of extension of the boundary line to the east of the town, linking up to part of the JLP boundary line and using an alternative section of the railway as a natural boundary.

This option comprises the extension of the town boundary into part of the JLP Development boundary area. However, similar issues as existing would be likely to reoccur before 2034.

Option 5 The complete grouping of both councils to form 'Okehampton Town and Hamlets Council'.

Grouping of both councils would completely alleviate the issue of council tax disparity between the two parishes now and in the future and improve efficiency. It would increase our voice within tiers of government and allow the (combined) council to have more influence on development around and within the town yet maintain the knowledge and importance of our rural proximity.

This would provide a base and identifiable focus for all residents in the Hamlets, who in any case presently use the Town facilities and resources. OTC suggest, in this scenario no change overall to the number of Members, and we could easily accommodate a total of 22 Members within Council organisation and meetings.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Following extensive review and discussion regarding this issue, at a meeting of OTC on 15th January 2018 it was resolved that the preferred option was Option 3.

Option 3 follows both the JLP and natural boundary lines, and aligns with Government Policy as depicted on page 4 of this document. It is acknowledged that this option leaves a small, rural parcel of land, believed to be protected by Dartmoor National Park, detached from the rest of OHPC, and as such OTC would be willing to incorporate this piece of land within its boundary if required.

³ Guidance on Community Governance Reviews

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf

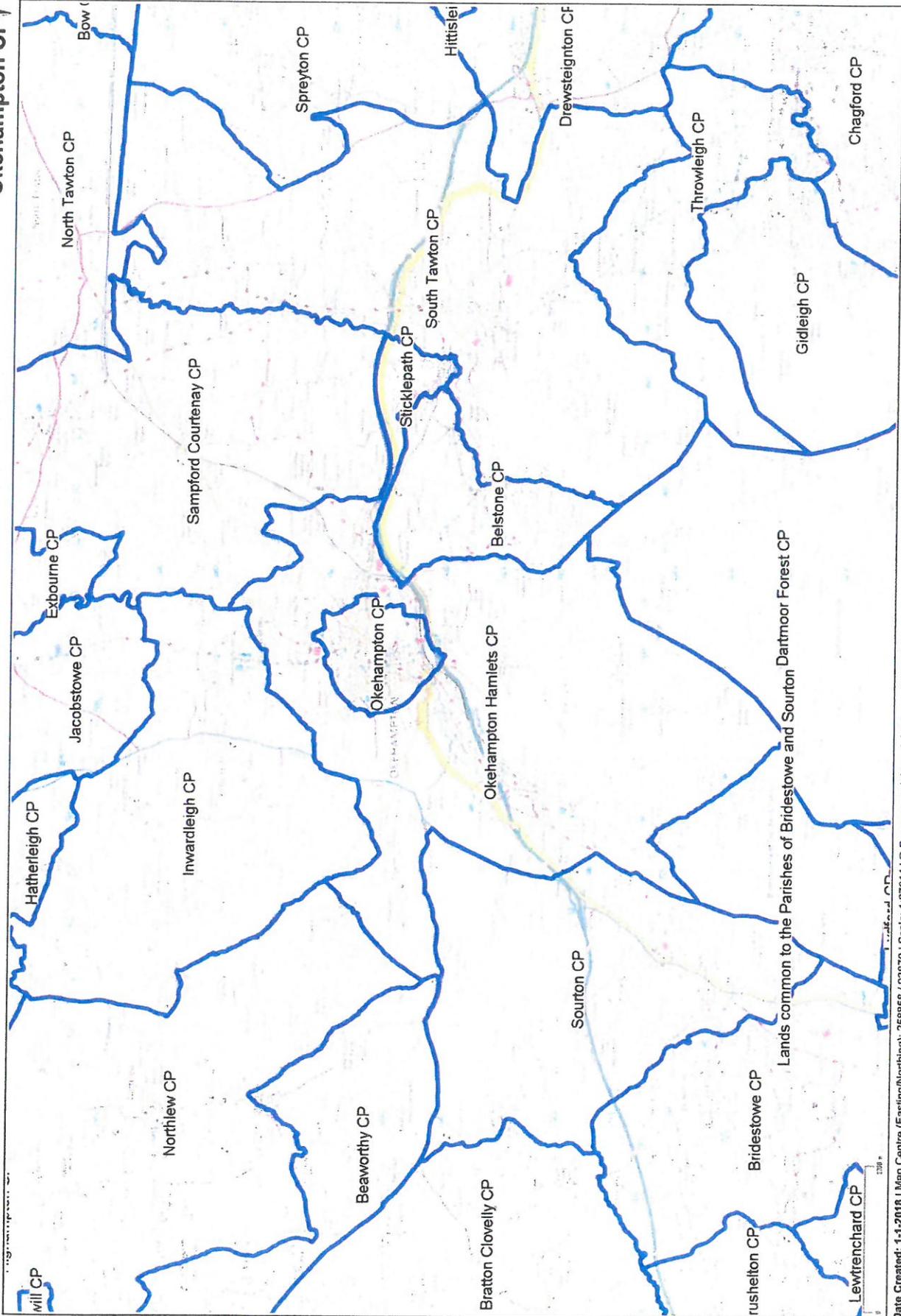
Appendix E depicts the existing OTC/OHPC parish boundary, the JLP development boundary and Option 3.

Therefore Okehampton Town Council request that due consideration be given to this document and the options therein, in particular noting OTC's preferred option, by WDBC at a meeting on 20th February 2018.

Okehampton Town Council
January 2018

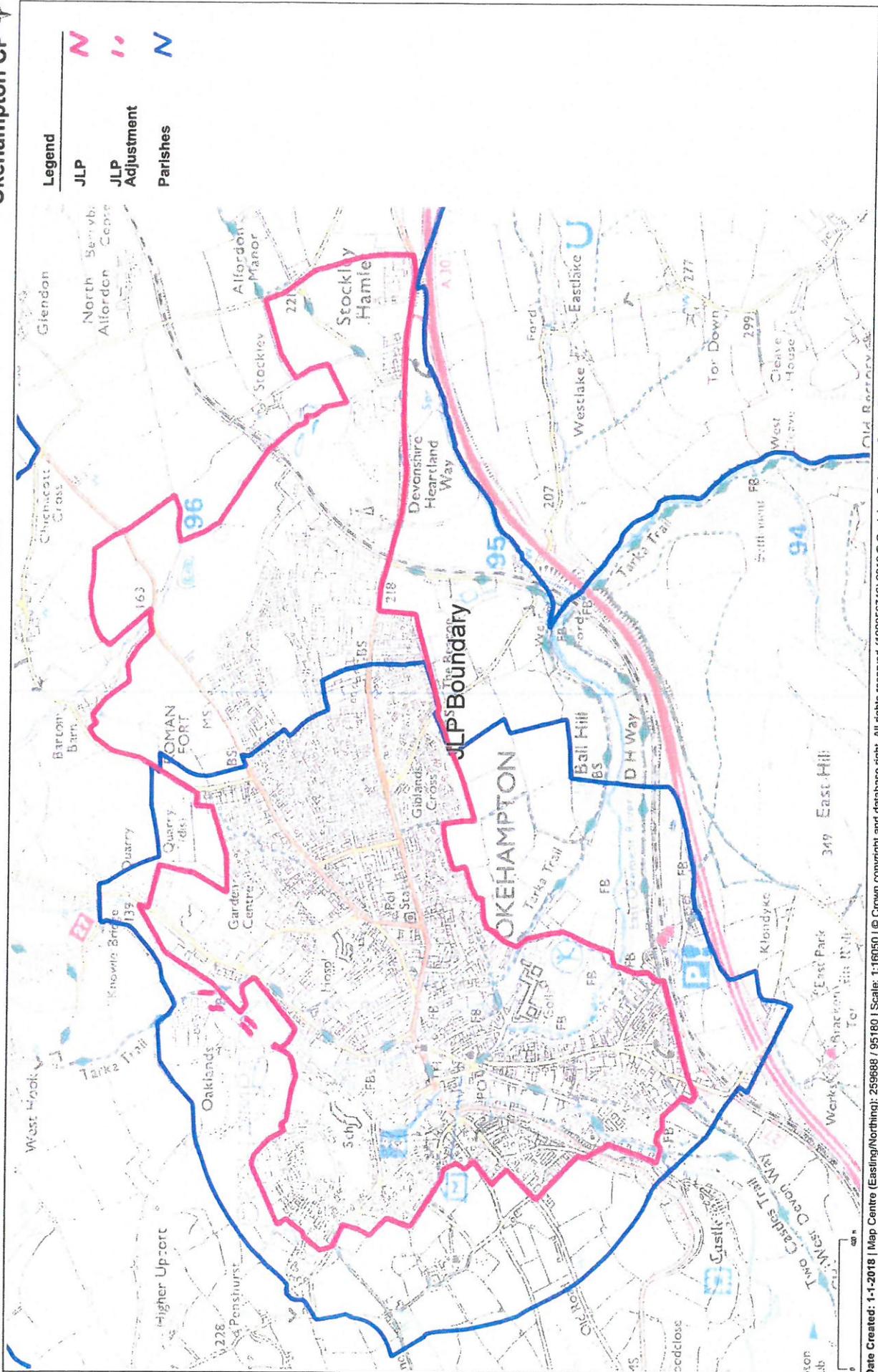
APPENDIX A
PARISH BOUNDARIES

Okehampton CP

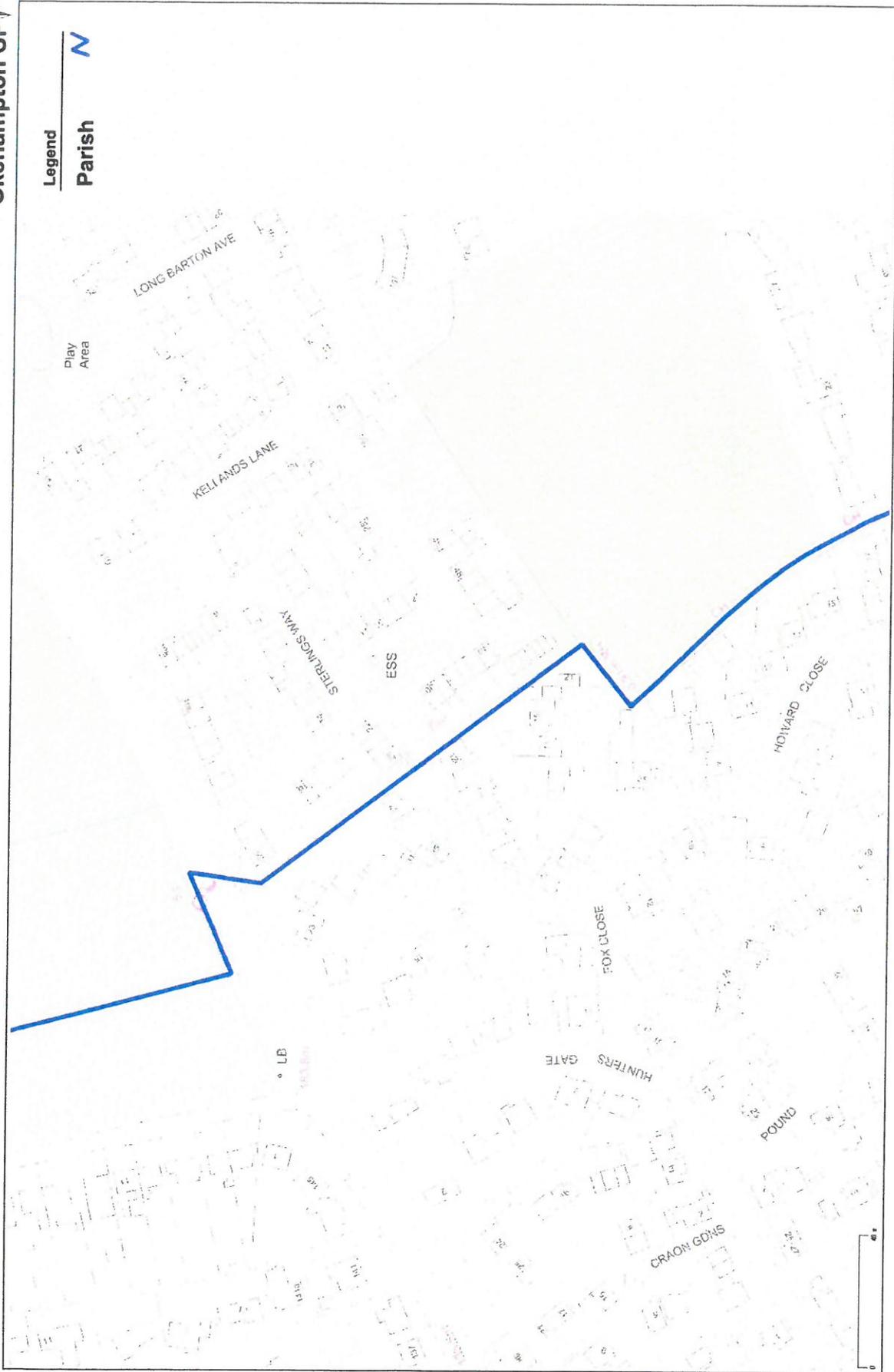


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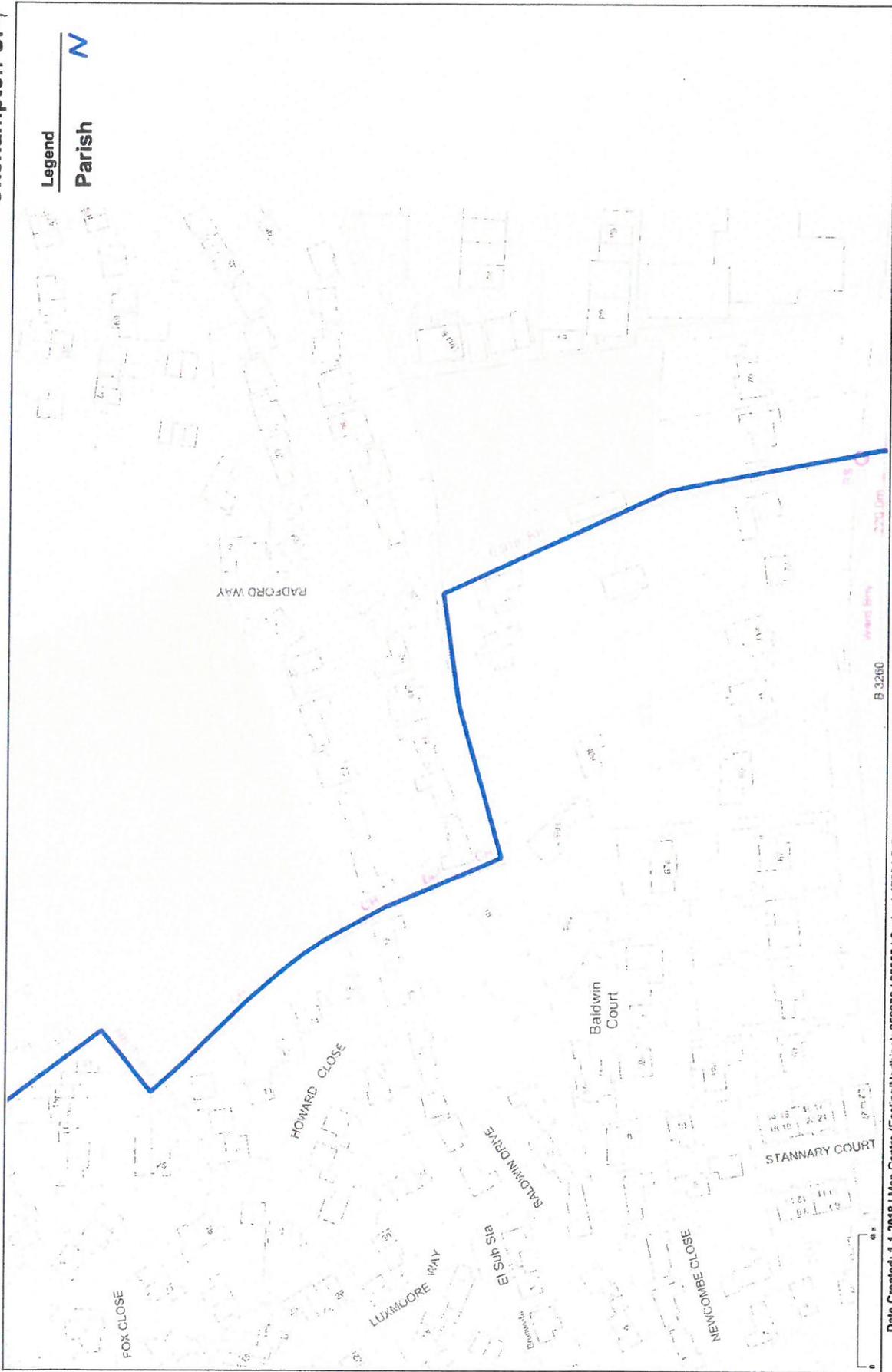
APPENDIX B
PARISH AND JLP DEVELOPMENT BOUNDARIES



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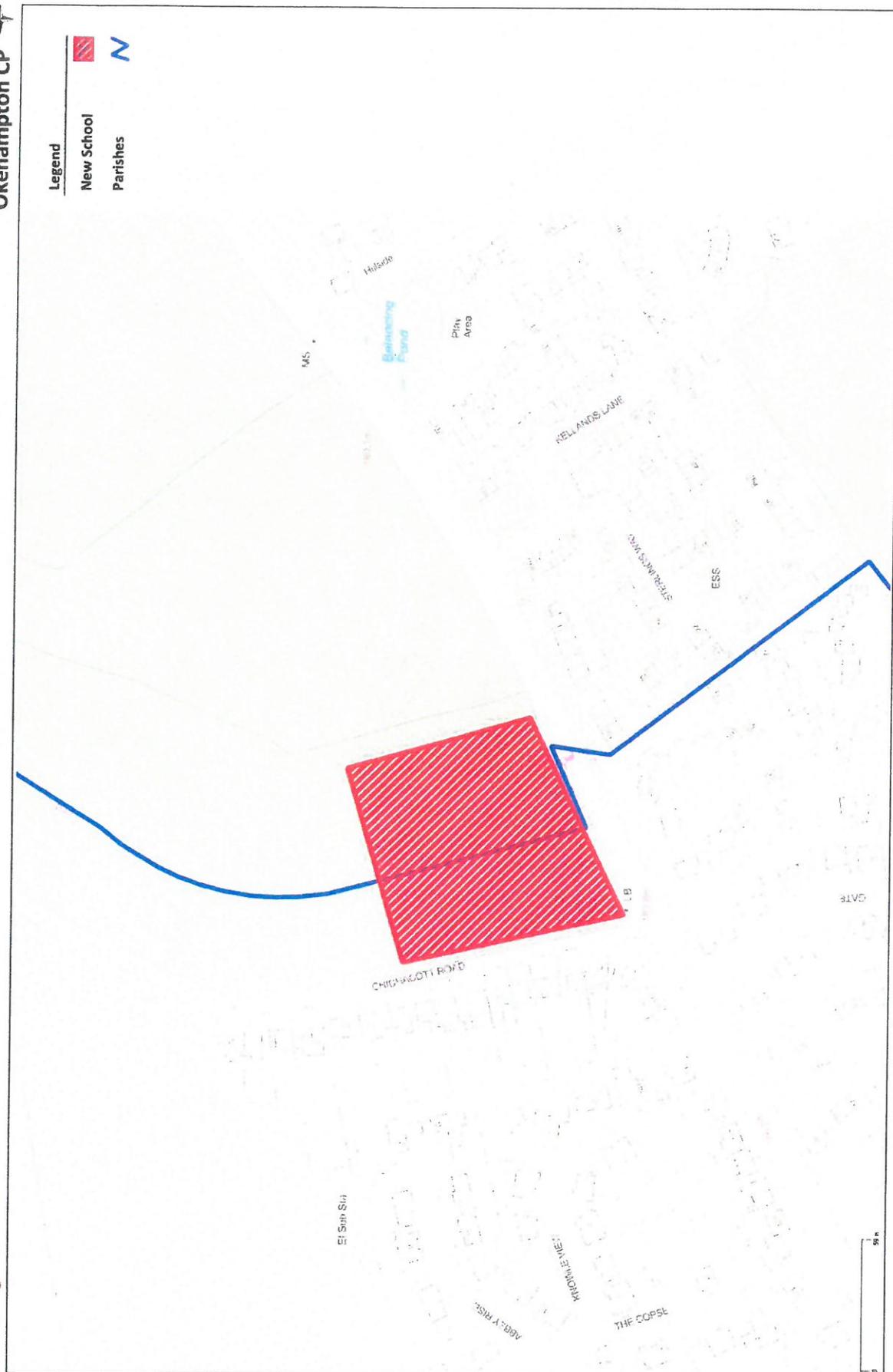


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