

Parish Community Centre
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Catherine Meek
Head of Democratic Services
Slough Borough Council

by email
22 October 2018

Dear Ms Meek

Re: Community Governance Review 2018

Britwell Parish Council notes the recommendations made by the Slough Borough Council Review team in favour of the abolition of Britwell Parish Council .

Further to your request for a further submission, Britwell PC notes the arguments you have put forward to residents in the leaflet which you are issuing and responds as follows: _

What Slough Borough Council Says

The borough council had hoped a reduction in size would enable the parish council to operate in a more strategic and focused way and bring about improved community engagement and more effective and convenient delivery of local services.

Britwell Parish Council Says

- As a result of the 2013 Review, the Borough Council reduced the size and scope of Britwell Parish Council. The local services it can provide relate to the Community Centre and the surrounding grounds.
- Since Summer 2017, Strategy has been an ongoing Agenda item at the monthly Full Council meetings.
- Focus on Strategy led the Parish Council to work closely with the Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) and Borough Council Events to run the Summer Celebration in June 2018.
- The Council is committed to ongoing partnership with NAG and Borough Council Events on future events, and is open to other partnerships which would benefit the local community.

What Slough Borough Council Says

The borough council .. is not convinced the parish council has made any significant improvements in the way it works, other than removing its direct involvement in running the Chicken Ranch bar,

Britwell Parish Council Says

There has been a major change in the way in which the Council works, moving from direct control to working increasingly in co-operation with others, including:-

- Working with Berkshire Active and also participating in “Active Slough”, organised by the Borough Council in 2018, by allowing the Community Centre and grounds to be used for:-
 - Wildcat Girls Football for 5-7 year olds and for 8-11 year olds;
 - Teen Boxing
 - Pilates
 - Rugby for children and young people.
- Working party meetings with the Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG) and Borough Council Events to plan the Summer Celebration in June 2018;
- Bringing in Tenants to run and take the commercial risk on the Bar, and in the process free the Parish Council from all the workload involved in running a Bar.

What Slough Borough Council Says

The borough council .. is not convinced the parish council ... has succeeded in bringing the community together despite it being a smaller parish council

Britwell Parish Council Says

- The only Bar now open in Britwell is the Chicken Ranch – the Borough Council would plan to close it;
- After a gap of two years, in June 2018, the community came together again at the Summer Celebration, a bigger and more inclusive event than previously held.
- Questionnaires were produced to seek Residents’ views on the Summer Celebration - 66 completed questionnaires were returned ,with 100% stating their support for the Summer Celebration as a good use of Council resources.
- The Hall is used by a variety of groups including Over 50’s Arts & Crafts; Britwell Come Dancing; Britwell Drama Group at reduced or subsidised rates as well as commercial users which benefits residents , such as Slimming World .
- New initiatives which are seen as benefitting and bringing together the community are considered and approved by the Parish Council at reduced or subsidised rates eg The Job Club.

What Slough Borough Council Says

The borough council also has concerns about the parish council's ability to operate effectively and transparently and, whilst some of its services are valued by local people, the borough council believes these and other services could be provided more efficiently and effectively for local residents by other means.

Britwell Parish Council Says

- The Parish Council meets monthly (other than August & December) and its meetings at the Community Centre are open . Does the Borough Council really believe that there will be more transparency for residents if Britwell issues are considered, amongst many other issues, in Slough by the Borough Council ?
- Neighbourhood police attend Parish Council meetings – where they are able to hear and be asked to respond to local issues.
- The Parish Council is able to offer residents and local groups a reduced or subsidised rate to hire the Hall – would the Borough Council continue to do so? The charges at the Britwell Centre (run by Slough Borough Council) are substantially higher than those charged to use the Parish Community Centre.
- Parish Council members live in the community – they hear of issues affecting local people and then bring to attention of those responsible – be it anti social behaviour (Monksfield Way & Twist Way), drug dealing (Monksfield Way & Upper Lees), dog fouling (Goodwin Road), or cars illegally parked (Long Readings Lane).
- The Borough Council gives no indications as to what costs savings if any it believes direct control would provide .

What Slough Borough Council Says

The review group has considered what arrangements might be put in place to engage with communities in the area if the parish were to be abolished. The existing parish council building could continue to be used, linked with its outdoor recreation space, as a centre for local young people and sport. Members noted the Britwell Hub provides a venue for recreational and social activities as well as learning and the local library. Parties and events could be supported by a temporary bar.

Britwell Parish Council Says

- The Parish Council consists of local people, who are able to hear and express Residents' concerns – be it to Neighbourhood Police who attend Council meetings or on local planning applications . That local democratic voice will disappear with the Borough Council's proposals;
- The Parish Council – being accountable to local Britwell people - is better placed to decide how best to use the Community Centre and grounds – hire out the car park

to a car wash business (No) or allow hire of Hall for Diabetic Screening at reduced rate (Yes) ;

- Having Tenants to run the only remaining Bar in Britwell – the Borough Council only plans to have a temporary bar for parties and events.
- It is not clear that the Britwell Hub could accommodate the non Youth groups which currently use the Parish Community Centre and if it did, it can only be assumed that they would be charged the rates publicised for the Britwell Hub – which for some might mean closing down their group.

In sum, the Borough Council's Review Team, as expressed in their leaflet to Britwell residents, is proposing a democratic deficit, in removing the presence of the Parish Council, but providing no real substance as to how and to what extent its direct administration would result in a material improvement for residents.

In view of the public interest, this letter will be copied to the media.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Holder
Locum Clerk