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Review of Parish Arrangements : Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy Parishes

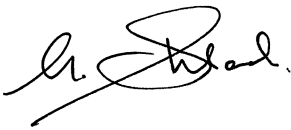
Dear Ms Jablonska

I have recently retired after 14 years as Parish Councillor for Offord D'Arcy, 6 of them as Chairman. I concluded some time ago that it would be best that the parishes of Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy amalgamate.

Although it is a little lengthy, I attach in entirety a paper I presented to the Clerk to both Parish Councillors.

In conclusion I support the amalgamation of the two Parish Councils into one. There would be 13 councillors, and no wards.

Yours sincerely



Graham Sherlock

Review of Parish Boundaries in Huntingdonshire: Recommendation to Offord Darcy Parish Council by Graham Sherlock

Background

From the HDC publication "District Wide" I note that a review of Parish Boundaries is underway, and representations are required by the end of July 2006.

During my time as Chairman of Offord Darcy Parish Council I asked HDC as to when such a review would take place and what was the process of having one Parish Council, but the reaction of Offord Cluny Parish Council at the time was hostile. As a result, I resolved not to raise the issue again until the end of the current term (i.e. now), or when HDC themselves undertook a review. Therefore now seems an ideal time for both Parish Councils to examine the subject seriously.

Objectives

I see no point in making change for change's sake, so I would see the paramount objective of any boundary change as being a positive improvement in the way in which the Parish Councils can serve the residents of The Offords.

Specifically, this means:

- ❖ A cost saving to the residents of The Offords
- ❖ Avoidance of duplicated time and effort by Councillors and the Clerk.
- ❖ More effective representation to other bodies.
- ❖ Parish Councillors continuing to represent local views
- ❖ The retention of the ancient names of Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy / Darcy

Proposal

My proposal is the simple amalgamation of the existing two Parish Councils into one named "The Parish Council of Offord Cluny and Offord Darcy". I do not propose ward boundaries. The number of Parish Councillors (which has to be odd) would be 13.

Arguments in favour

1. Cost savings: The Clerk's time would be reduced because of a reduction in duplicated effort – dealing with incoming and outgoing post, liaising with two Chairmen, attending two Council meetings, arranging Joint Meetings etc. Only one venue would need paying for. Only one grass cutting contract. There would be less need for Councillors from both Parish Councils attending briefings. In my view, if the Councils decide on the Quality Council route, the overheads are such that it only makes financial sense if there is one Parish Council.
2. Councillor's time: Many, if not most, existing agenda items concern the village as a whole, yet time is spent discussing separately causing duplicated effort. There seem to be an increasing number of items of common concern leading to Joint Working Parties or Joint Parish Council Meetings. These could be avoided with one Council.
3. Representation to other bodies: A single view from one Parish Council would have more effect than that of two smaller bodies. At times the Parish Councils have given differing and even opposing views, and this had undoubtedly weakened the case of "The Offords". The role of Parish Councils is changing – proposals are afoot to provide more powers - and it is the duty of Councillors to ensure the most effective representation possible to the District Council, County Council, Police, Highways Agency, Railtrack etc. In particular, we are now getting closer to the "meat" of the new Local Development Framework, and in my view a common representation would have far more influence.

Arguments against

1. Loss of local representation: I have little sympathy for this argument. There are no other village organisations split between parishes. Even the parish church is amalgamated with Buckden. There is an option to have one Parish Council with "wards" but I believe this route would lessen the effect of one Parish Council reflecting the views of what is, after all, a compact village community. It would lead to petty views and arguments, as can be seen with Town Councils and District Councils. It is also fraught with difficulty – for example, what would the number of councillors be reflecting the 60/40 population split, yet retaining an odd total? If it is felt that grass roots representation is being lost, one solution is for certain Councillors to be charged with reporting on issues relating to a particular area – rather like the "watches" of Neighbourhood Watch.
2. Loss of ancient Parish names: I have a great deal of sympathy with this problem, having spent a lot of time on village history research. The existing boundaries not only derive from the parochial boundaries of 1896 when civil parishes were formed, but go back beyond Domesday to Saxon times. I feel strongly that at least the names should be retained as "The Parish Council of Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy (or Darcy)".

Other issues

If the Parish Councils are to be amalgamated, there are a number of other issues that come to mind that need to be resolved. These need to be thought about sooner rather than later:

1. Delegated trustees: both Parish Councils delegate trustees to village organisations such as Village Hall and Millennium Green. The relevant constitutions need to be consulted. The Offord Darcy Consolidated Charities has been wound up, but the Cluny Pools Charity might provide a challenge.
2. Existing loans and dedicated funds: these would have to be honoured by the new body. A particular issue is the substantial funds built up by Offord Darcy Parish Council for recreational purposes, until recently reflected in a larger "rate" on their parishioners. My opinion is that the history should be forgotten, and the loans and funds be pooled together for the benefit of the village as a whole.
3. Special obligations: these again would have to be honoured by the new body. In the case of Darcy, there are the graveyard, cemetery and churchyard.
4. Capital equipment: ownership would need to be carried forward to the new body. In the case of Darcy, there are the shredder and trailer (not actually owned), grass strimmer and hedge trimmer.

Graham Sherlock
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