

Community Governance Review

February 2012

Formation of an Independent

Badgers Mount Parish Council

Requested by:

The Badgers Mount Residents Association

The Badgers Mount Residents Association (BMRA) would like Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to consider Badgers Mount Ward splitting from Shoreham Parish Council (SPC) and forming a Parish Council in its own right.

Brief synopsis of reasons for Badgers Mount Ward splitting from SPC

- Badgers Mount and Shoreham are completely separate communities, the centres of which are some 2 miles apart, they share no natural boundary or landscape and they have no social or transport links
- Badgers Mount residents do not use facilities in Shoreham
- The three Wards of SPC are served by three different District Councillors, and are covered by separate policing areas
- The majority of the precept is spent on facilities within Shoreham
- Badgers Mount Ward Councillors are often outvoted on matters which they are concerned about, due to the disparity in the number of councillors in each Ward
- The majority of SPC meetings are spent on matters relating to Shoreham and sometimes Badgers Mount councillors are discouraged from taking part in discussions.

Background

The Parish Council has voted that it wants to remain a 3 ward Parish Council. It is not entirely surprising that this decision was arrived at given that the Shoreham Parish Council consists of 6 Shoreham Ward representatives, 3 Badgers Mount Ward representatives and 1 Well Hill Ward representative. If you consider that Badgers Mount contribute a significant sum to the Council's precept each year, which is largely spent on Shoreham's amenities and expenses, it would clearly disadvantage the Shoreham Ward if Badgers Mount Ward were to break away from Shoreham Parish Council.

Further to this, Shoreham Parish Council also voted to reject a notion by the Chairman to change its name to Shoreham, Well Hill and Badgers Mount Parish Council. This deprives Badgers Mount and Well Hill of having their own identity.

Badgers Mount residents have not been given an opportunity by the council to express **their** views. Therefore the Badgers Mount Residents Association would like to make a representation to Sevenoaks District Council regarding their views on the matter.

There has been a substantial history of the Badgers Mount Residents seeking independence from the Shoreham Parish. Indeed one of our residents, Mr Albert Thomas made a bid some thirty or so years ago, and he is still of the opinion that this move would most definitely be the right decision for the community of Badgers Mount.

The present parish, formed in 1894, and consists of several separate communities, Shoreham, Badgers Mount and Well Hill being the largest of them. Badgers Mount has no social links with Well Hill or Shoreham. Landscape wise, we are more similar to Well Hill than Shoreham. We share very little characteristics with the village of Shoreham. Shoreham has a High Street, a shop, several pubs, and the properties generally are smaller and terraced in nature. Shoreham benefits from having several amenities such as allotments, tennis courts, recreation ground and public toilets. Shoreham also suffers from parking issues. Badgers Mount properties are generally larger, detached with big gardens. We only have one pub which actually, falls within Halstead Parish really. We have no shops or other amenities. Shoreham is the only part of the Parish with recreation space and allotments. If Badgers Mount became an independent parish it is aware that they would have a duty to provide these facilities if possible and if there is a proven need for them.

However, the three communities are actually neighbours and do share concerns from time to time, so it would be beneficial to remain in contact with both communities if a split was successful.

Shoreham Parish Council implemented a working party to establish the positive and negative aspects of re-organising the parish. Below is information which identifies differences and common interests / concerns:

Differences and Common Ground between the three Wards of Shoreham Parish Council

District Councillors Shoreham, Badgers Mount and Well Hill are all served by different District Councillors.

Emergency Services and Policing Shoreham and Badgers Mount are served by Kent Fire & Rescue, whereas Well Hill obtain first response from London Fire & Rescue.

The three wards are covered by 3 separate policing areas.

Local Services /
Facilities

Each of the three areas access services provided by different post offices, shops and libraries.

There is no public bus service linking Badgers Mount to either Well Hill or Shoreham. Our residents have to walk a fair distance or drive to use any facilities in Shoreham village. Although Shoreham has a railway station it is not on the same line as Knockholt station thus limiting those who can access their services from Badgers Mount. Also, due to the parking problems in Shoreham even if our residents drove to Shoreham to access their facilities it is not possible to park.

Few pupils from Badgers Mount or Well Hill attend or have attended Shoreham Village school.

Shoreham and Badgers Mount are covered by Tunbridge Wells telephone directory, whilst Well Hill is covered by Bromley area directory.

Limited participation in Shoreham based societies by Badgers Mount and Well Hill residents.

Some interest in acquiring allotments from Badgers Mount

Common Concerns

Shoreham and Badgers Mount both have sites identified within the KCC Minerals & Waste Consultation Proposals.

Having reviewed the positive and negative aspects of the alternatives available, the following options seemed the most viable:

Option 1 Status Quo remains, i.e. Shoreham, Badgers Mount and Well Hill make up one parish council

Option 2 Badgers Mount becomes a ward of Halstead Parish Council, thereby adding 545 electors to the existing 1208

Option 3 Each of the three wards forms its own parish council

These options are explored in more detail below:

Option 1 - Status Quo (Least favoured option)

Shoreham, Badgers Mount and Well Hill make up one parish council, as exists now.

- There would be some difficulty in developing a Neighbourhood Plan that would adequately meet the needs of these three very different communities.
- Badgers Mount Ward Councillors feel that due to the ratio of representation by Shoreham Ward Councillors, it is easy for them to get 'outvoted' on topics which matter to them and their ward.
- It has been suggested by A Shoreham Ward Councillor, as well as some Shoreham residents, that Badgers Mount Ward Councillors should not voice their opinions on matters relating to Shoreham Village. This could unfortunately cause bad feelings between the different wards. Given that 90% of the matters discussed at the Parish Council are Shoreham related, this would make Badgers Mount Ward Councillors largely silent and redundant if they were to abide by this request.
- Evidence of Lack of Respect for Badgers Mount Councillors in Shoreham Parish: This is a comment made by a resident on a social network site, discussing situations arising in Shoreham. We believe it shows the myopic view held within the parish regarding the Badgers Mount Parish Councillors remit.

"... I was in attendance and can only endorse Ann's report as a very fair representation of events. But I was astounded by the view of some PC members, noticeably by those that do not live in the village and following a debate about whether the PC should split, where it was stated, very sensibly, that those not in an area should abstain on issues not relevant to them, I was appalled to see some members who do not live in the village them commenting on the lines in Crown Road." (21 hours ago – 5th February 2012)

- The residents of Badgers Mount currently and historically have felt they have no identity. A sense of identity is important for any community. It is noticeable in the Shoreham Parish Plan that was compiled in 2005, the illustrations (of which there are several) are entirely of Shoreham village. Well Hill and Badgers Mount have village signs and a pub each which could have been featured, but do NOT. The Badgers Mount residents feel a distinct need for their own identity.
- Badgers Mount residents will continue to contribute heavily to a precept that will ultimately benefit the residents in Shoreham, more so than anywhere else in the Parish.

- Badgers Mount would continue to miss out on notifications such as the Waste and Minerals Consultation invitation to stakeholder meetings, and more recently, the Community Governance Review.

Detailed below is a list of positive and negative aspects of the status quo remaining:

Positives

- There are established structures in place that are proven
- All Wards benefit from economy of scales
- Level of income established
- Size of the parish *may* carry more weight
- Diversity of Wards could be seen as a strength, inhibiting a myopic view of issues

Negatives

- Badgers Mount and Well Hill contribute to a larger precept that does not necessarily benefit their own communities
- Wards do not share the same District Councillors
- Little social contact between residents of the 3 areas, so no established link
- Served by 3 policing areas, so consistent approach difficult to achieve
- Councillors have to consider issues that have little relevance for their Ward
- Badgers Mount and Well Hill residents find it difficult to attend meetings in Shoreham due to location and parking issues. This means they often miss out on hearing about important changes in their communities, such as the Minerals and Waste Consultation process.
- Badgers Mount Parish Councillors are not always respected by all the Shoreham Councillors or Shoreham community.
- There are no public transportation links between the three villages

Option 2 - Badgers Mount becomes a Ward of Halstead Parish Council

It has been considered that perhaps Badgers Mount ward would benefit by joining Halstead Parish. However, whilst we enjoy a more natural (geographically) neighbourly relationship with Halstead, this union could still disadvantage Badgers Mount:

- Financially there would be no benefit to Badgers Mount residents as Halstead still has a wealth of amenities to fund. Having said this, as Halstead is 1.5 miles nearer to Badgers Mount than Shoreham it could be expected that Badgers Mount residents would be able to access Halstead's amenities more readily than they do Shoreham's amenities.
- Badgers Mount Ward Councillors would be joining an existing established structure, which would be easier than establishing a new parish council, however this could cause friction amongst existing ward councillors who might resent 'new blood' having the right to make decisions for their ward.
- Badgers Mount Ward Councillors would experience the same situation as they currently do with Shoreham, in being outnumbered and outvoted by even greater numbers of existing parish councillors

Regretfully, BMRA therefore feel that it is not in Badgers Mount's best interests to become part of Halstead Parish Council. They would like to forge stronger links with Halstead Parish though, if they are permitted to become independent from Shoreham Parish.

Option 3 - Each Ward Forms its own Parish Council

- A District Council must establish a parish council if the population consists of 200 or more local government electors. The number of electors in each ward is above 200: Badgers Mount – 545, Shoreham – 892, Well Hill – 216; so all wards are viable as an independent parish. This would amount to Well Hill possibly becoming the smallest parish council in the district.
- The Shoreham Parish Plan that was drawn up in 2005, indicated that 55% of Badgers Mount residents wanted independence from Shoreham Parish. The BMRA took a brief vote this month from residents as to whether they would prefer to stay within Shoreham Parish, or whether they would prefer to break away and form an independent parish council. The vote yielded a 76% vote in favour of splitting from Shoreham.

- Consideration needs to be given as to whether potential benefits are greater than increased costs. The greatest benefit for Badgers Mount has to be for it to gain its own identity and greater control over what level of precept it is prepared to pay.

Ward within current parish and percentage of electorate	No. of Councillors required	Change in income from precept at present level	Cost of Parish Clerk	Cost of insurance	Section 137 of Local Gov Act 1972* expenditure permitted: (£10,168 currently for whole parish)
Badgers Mount 33%	5		Est. £4,000 p.a. 5 hrs. per week plus expenses	Est. £1,000 p.a. plus expenses	£3,352
Shoreham 54%	7	Reduced by 45 %: residents would need to pay more	Unchanged: £12,000 plus expenses	Unchanged: £1,500	£5,486
Well Hill 13%	5		£2,000 p.a. plus expenses	Est. £500	£1,328
* This enables local councils to spend limited money for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure. It is capped. Most of this expenditure is grants that are awarded					

Independence for Badgers Mount would mean:

- All meetings would take place within the Badgers Mount Memorial Hall, which is easily accessible for all residents in Badgers Mount and would obviously encourage them to attend and participate in increased numbers.
- The meeting would be more concise as all the matters discussed would be relevant to Badgers Mount.
- The community is expected to become more involved in the Parish Council work with more people willing to stand as Councillors as they will not feel demoralised by being out-voted on issues that matter to Badgers Mount residents.
- Matters could be discussed in more detail due to less time constraints, and there could be increased time allocated to residents to enable them to voice their concerns.

- Ward Councillors would feel they could make a real difference to their community. History has suggested that ex Badgers Mount Councillors have left Shoreham Parish Council because they do not feel they can make a difference. They did not feel that with the current ratio of representation, they would get changes that would benefit Badgers Mount.
- Any money would solely be for the benefit of Badgers Mount residents.
- They would have more control over the level of precept and Council Tax liability to the community.
- There could be more volunteers to serve on the Council that was so locally focused, although this cannot be assumed.
- They could draw up a more personal Neighbourhood Plan, in accordance with the Localism Act.
- Halstead, Knockholt and Badgers Mount District Councillors put in very rare appearances at Shoreham Parish Council meetings. One would hope, if the meetings are held in the local hall and are purely about Badgers Mount, that the District Councillors would be happy to pop along for 30 minutes per meeting to deliver a report.
- Most importantly, Badgers Mount residents would finally achieve the independence and sense of identity many of whom have sought for decades.

Financial Considerations

First Years' Forecast Running Costs for Badgers Mount Parish Council:

	Shoreham estimated 2010/11	Suggested for Badgers Mount	
ADMINISTRATION			
Advertising	0	50	Need for new Clerk
Audit fees	335	250	
Chairman's special allowance	100	100	
Clerks salary	11,556	4000	
Clerks expenses, postage, stationery	200	150	
Clerks mileage	400	250	
Members allowance	50	750	Shoreham budget 2011/12 - £1500

Members mileage	150	150
Office computer	450	450
Photocopier	50	50
Office rent	360	350
Office telephone	300	250
Hall hire	550	500
Legal expenses	0	0
Elections	0	1000
Insurance	1400	1000
Shoreham Post	1540	750
Training	450	500
Sundry office	100	100
Subscriptions - KALC	613	600
SLCC	160	150
others	70	100
Office Scribe licence	195	200
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	19029	11700

? maybe funded by SDC

Dog bins	1500	500
General repairs	1000	500
Grass cutting	500	600
Black sacks	50	50
Salt bins & salt	1000	500
Footpaths	50	50
Lengthsman	600	400
Refuse freighter	540	250
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	5240	2850

S'ham total budget for
2011/12 = 750

PROJECTS

Fort Halstead working group	50	50
-----------------------------	----	----

S'ham budget for 2011/12 =
250

SUMMARY

Administration	19029	11700
Amenities & general services	4650	2850
Projects	50	50
Grants	4000	1000
Emergency planning	50	50
Possible projects (unknown)	6940	1000
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	34719	16650

For precept, allow for second Clerks salary		4000
		<hr/>
		20650
		<hr/>
		20650

Only req if Clerk sick for year

Finally we would strongly suggest that each new Parish should still keep links with its neighbours, to form alliances and offer support on joint issues of threat or benefit, i.e. KCC Minerals & Waste Consultation, the development of Fort Halstead, or achieving faster broadband. Badgers Mount would like to embrace the essence of the Localism Act by the *'shift[ing]...[of] power... towards local people.'* The Act promises to give *'new rights and powers for communities and individuals'*, and *'reform to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally'*. This can only happen for the people of Badgers Mount if they are given their independence. The Act states that it will; *'giv[e] people the opportunity to take control of decisions that matter to them,'* and the only way that can happen is if Badgers Mount is allowed to stand alone. *'The Localism Act therefore gives local communities the power to decide'*, and Badgers Mount has decided it would like to form The Badgers Mount Parish Council to represent the local community.

NB: The Badgers Mount Residents Association were disappointed not to receive direct correspondence from the District Council regarding the Governance Review. We are after all, a known community group to you and you do state in the Terms of Reference: *'Specifically, the District Council will write to all parish councils and to other known community groups.'* Would you please ensure that the BMRA are kept FULLY up to date on any other matters that affect Badgers Mount.
