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Chief Executive  
Waverley Borough Council  
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Dear Sirs

### **Local Governance Review Rowledge**

Farnham Town Council objects to the proposal for the creation of a separate Parish Council for Rowledge, splitting the existing Rowledge and Wrecclesham Ward. Farnham Town Council also objects to the annexing of part of the Shortheath and Boundstone Ward to be part of the proposed Rowledge Parish area.

Set out below are reasons why the Town Council holds this view.

### **Rational Boundaries**

The current Farnham Town Council boundary is rational. The Town Council has recognised that the village of Rowledge itself is split by the County boundary, with part in Hampshire and part in Surrey. The splitting of the existing Rowledge and Wrecclesham Ward to create the proposed new Parish does not create the desired unification of the whole of the village into a separate parish nor does it fit with the historic or ecclesiastical boundaries. It would contain the Village Hall but neither the School nor the Church which are integral parts of the "Village" but situated in Hampshire.

The annexing of another part of Farnham, outside the Rowledge Ward boundary, also splitting the Shortheath and Boundstone Ward, has never been proposed previously and further complicates the separation of the 'recognised' village community and makes no practical sense (apart from adding extra financial resource for the new Parish from any additional precept).

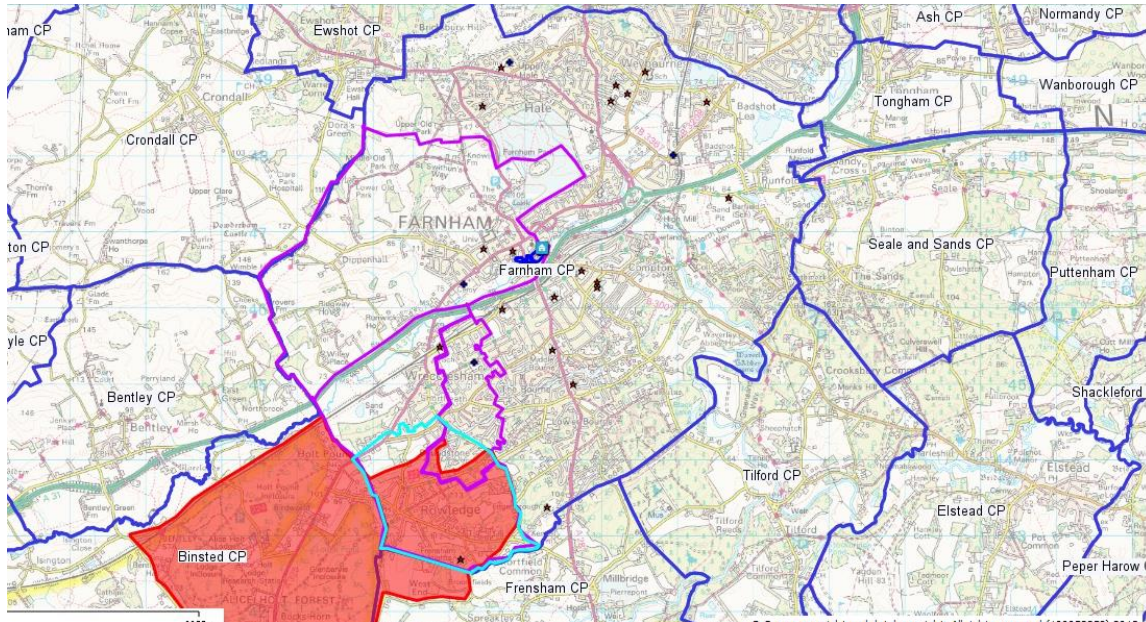
In addition the proposed abstraction of Rowledge from Town Council area creates a chunk out of the current Town Council boundary which isn't logical. The natural line of the



existing boundary would be broken, with a noticeable tear in the fabric of the Town boundary. Similarly Echo Barn Lane is certainly not considered by Farnham Town Council nor its residents to be part of Rowledge.

Farnham Town Council invests councillor and staff time in supporting local communities who want to take responsibility for activities locally but this must be done in a framework which is meaningful and rational.

Overall the area selected is too small to be a viable entity which can properly represent the local people.



Map showing proposed boundary (blue) split of the Shortheath and Boundstone boundary (purple) and ecclesiastical boundary (red) with the largest part of the Rowledge ecclesiastical Parish in Binsted (Hampshire).

### **Sandrock Triangle**

There is no evidence to suggest that residents living in the ‘Sandrock Triangle’ wish to be part of Rowledge, nor take part in or feel part of community activities in Rowledge. The area was annexed by the proposers of the scheme after the initial discussions and appears to be more about cartographical convenience rather than community will or enthusiasm. In fact, the Town Council has received representations from residents in the area concerned about the way this has been carried out and stating that there is no relationship between the Boundstone area and Rowledge. None of the Electors in the “Sandrock Triangle” signed the Petition and many are unhappy or hostile to their proposed annexation.

The Town Council believes that this proposal will fragment rather than create community cohesion.

The Town Council is concerned over the impact that splitting of the existing Shortheath and Boundstone ward will have electorally, representationally, and from a community cohesion point of view.

## **Cohesion, Community and Convenience**

At present, the Rowledge community is consulted and engaged with in relation to all Town Council matters, e.g. the Farnham Design Statement, the Neighbourhood Plan and other projects. The Town Council works closely with all local organisations and residents' associations, including those in Rowledge and there has been active participation by representatives of Rowledge in a wide range of activities in Farnham.

Waverley Borough Council has a responsibility to the whole of Farnham. The potentially detrimental effect on the rest of Farnham; financially, cohesively and community-wise should be paramount when considering whether or not to create a new Parish Council with the extra burden of administration for Waverley Borough Council.

The Town Council's area is made up of a large number of distinct communities both rural and urban including those in the Town itself. Each village has its own identity. Farnham as a whole has an identity that is strengthened by and permeates through its separate communities. In some ways Farnham is a microcosm of the Borough and both have strived to create synergy and cohesion whilst maintaining the individual characteristics of the separate communities that make up their respective areas.

A local governance review ought to seek to improve community engagement and local democracy. Farnham Town Council does not agree that the creation of a Rowledge Parish Council is a more effective and convenient way to deliver these goals. Rowledge residents would be no more empowered locally, by the creation of a separate Parish Council, than they are now as part of Farnham Town Council. The Waverley report on the proposals set out a number of different ways communities can be empowered, virtually all of which were for areas that were not already parished. The Town Council believes there are more effective ways of delivering a stronger voice and improved representation without creating a new Parish. These could include having community group representatives from Rowledge that would meet with Farnham Town Council to take up any issues or concerns locally. The Town Council would welcome an approach such as this.

## **Adverse Effects of Creating Rowledge Parish Council**

### **Fragmentation**

The issue of fragmentation has already been stated in relation to Shortheath and Boundstone, but there is a more significant issue of fragmentation for the Town Council area as a whole. Enormous efforts have been made in binding together the different villages in the Farnham Design Statement and the Neighbourhood Plan and through community recognition through activities such as the Services to Farnham Awards, grants and Farnham In Bloom. Whilst these activities can indeed continue over a smaller area, the Town Council believes there would be a significant loss for both sides. The Town Council has made representations on a number of more strategic issues such as mineral extraction, Farnborough Aerodrome, developments at Bordon, the A325 etc. which have been of direct interest and benefit of Rowledge. The Town Council can do this because it has staff capacity and can spread its resources over a larger area and address more strategic issues.

It is unlikely, as evidenced from smaller parishes elsewhere, that this same level of input could be delivered by staff in a smaller parish.

## **Financial**

The existing Town Council area brings with it economies of scale enabling a wide range of community services to be delivered. There is no doubt that if areas fragmented from the Town Council valued local services such as the Public Conveniences, Christmas Lights, Farnham in Bloom, CCTV provision, and the range of events and other services that help make Farnham an attractive area to live in, work in or visit would be under threat. The proponents of the scheme have estimated that the precept loss to the Town Council would be in the region of £53,000 if the households in Rowledge were incorporated into a new Parish Council and around £85,000 if the properties from Boundstone were added. This sum would represent just under 9.4% of the 2013/14 precept level which could see the rest of Farnham households face a precept increase of up to 15% if services were not cut or additional savings made.

Despite this impact, the proponents of the new Parish Council have subsequently indicated that there may well be no saving for the residents of Rowledge. They have quoted a minimum level of funding needed for year one of the Parish Council (£17,000) but acknowledged that this would not achieve the desired funding for a new Village Hall or much in the way of local services for the village and that a higher level was more likely. If the precept level were capped as the Government have indicated, the Parish Council may find itself in a very difficult position if its precept level were capped at this low level and residents are unlikely to see any financial benefit from the change. It appears as if some of the original financial arguments put forward by the proponents of the scheme when collecting signatures for the petition may have been misleading.

The arguments put forward for the creation of the new Parish seem to be largely financial in that the “new” Parishioners would be able to pay lower Council Tax but still benefit from all the Farnham Town Council provided facilities. Some have said this could be likened to saying “*I have no children so why should some of my taxes be used for Education?*”.

The proposers of the scheme have argued that it will be easier for a small group to get loans for future projects such as the new Village Hall but the reverse is more likely to be true and Farnham Town Council has successfully supported the Wrecclesham Community Centre Trustees in obtaining grants for the Wrecclesham Village Hall.

## **Capacity**

Whilst a new Parish will be able to discuss directly with other tiers of local government and further afield, there is no evidence that this will be a stronger voice than being part of Farnham; on the contrary it may well be the case that the capacity to have an effective voice is reduced as a result of the proposed parish being smaller unit.

During the local workshop and in discussion with other residents of Rowledge, the Town Council representatives have posed the question “When has the Town Council failed to respond to an issue raised by Rowledge?”. To date, no specific examples have been raised with the only arguments being put back by the proponents of the scheme being based on the fact that Rowledge does not see all of the precept raised being spent in the village.

## Consultation & Referendum

Farnham Town Council believes that ALL electors of Farnham should be consulted on the formal proposal as all will be affected by the loss of Rowledge. It is particularly important that all the adjacent areas are included especially as the representation of Rowledge and Wrecclesham and Shortheath and Boundstone will be directly affected by the change. The Town Council is concerned that the Rowledge electors could potentially annex and outvote the "Sandrock Triangle" area by virtue of the fact that there is a 60:40 majority in the number of households for that area. If the area for the referendum were limited to the proposed new Parish area this would be deeply concerning.

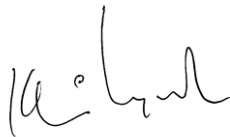
## Sustainability

Proposals for the creation of something new, including the creation of a new Parish can generate a lot of initial enthusiasm. However, concern has been expressed by a number of Rowledge residents about whether this enthusiasm will continue after the initial period. In their publicity material, the proposers have suggested that if this happened then Rowledge could rejoin Farnham, but if this were to happen it would seem to be an expensive and wasteful proposal. A smaller Parish would not necessarily have the capacity or economies of scale to undertake the services it may wish to provide.

The Neighbourhood Planning process has brought people together across the whole of Farnham and the importance of protecting Farnham as a whole had been highlighted. The Town Council believes that some of the most vulnerable areas are at the edge of the Town Council area. The success of the Design Statement was that all the communities had worked together bringing greater strength. This would be lost if the proposal were implemented.

Overall, the Town Council believes that the wider perspective and the benefits of being part of a larger area with costs shared and benefits shared means that the proposal for a new Parish cannot be supported. The Town Council further believes that as the proposal could have a significant impact on every household in the Town Council area, then every elector should have the opportunity of voting for the eventual outcome.

Yours faithfully,



Iain Lynch  
Town Clerk