



BRAUNSTONE TOWN COUNCIL

www.braunstonetowncouncil.org.uk

Darren Tilley – Chief Executive & Town Clerk

BRAUNSTONE CIVIC CENTRE Kingsway, Braunstone Town, Leicester LE3 2PP

Civic Centre Reception & Bookings, Customer Service Shop
Thorpe Astley Community Centre Bookings
Email: enquiries@braunstonetowncouncil.org.uk

Tel: 0116 2890045
Tel: 0116 2890704
Fax: 0116 2824785

Our Ref: Town Clerk\Community Governance Review

Your Ref: Community Governance Review

When calling please ask for: Darren Tilley

Louisa Horton
Democratic Services, Scrutiny and Governance Manager
Blaby District Council
Council Offices
Desford Road
Narborough
Leicestershire
LE19 2EP

1st March 2022

Dear Louisa,

Re: Community Governance Review – Braunstone Parish

Thank you for your letter dated 17th January 2022 advising that Blaby District Council is undertaking a review of the Electoral Arrangements of the parish of Braunstone.

On 27th January 2022, Braunstone Town Council unanimously passed the following resolution:

“Braunstone Town Council notes with disappointment the decision of Blaby District Council on 14th December 2021 to undertake a Community Governance Review of the Parish of Braunstone with a view to creating a separate parish for Thorpe Astley since:

- a) Blaby District Council had not received a Community Governance petition, signed by 7.5% of the electorate of the whole parish of Braunstone Town (in accordance with Section 80 (3) (c) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as amended by The Legislative Reform (Community Governance Reviews) Order 2015);*
- b) there had been no material changes to the parish since the last Community Governance review in 2011;*
- c) the Leader of Blaby District Council had confirmed that the District Council had not received any representations from registered electors in Thorpe Astley or any other part of Braunstone Town; and*

- d) *no consultation was undertaken with the officers or elected members of Braunstone Town Council prior to the publication of the report on Blaby District Council's agenda*".

"In the absence of any significant support from electors across Braunstone Town, the Town Council can only assume the rationale for undertaking a Community Governance Review is because of short-term partisan party political reasons".

"Therefore, this Council calls on Blaby District Council to ensure that any future recommendation to split the existing parish and create new parish of Thorpe Astley should be shown to have the support of the majority of electors across Braunstone Town since this will:

- 1. result in the reduction in the quality and diversity of services available to all the residents, but especially those residents in any smaller parish;*
- 2. result in an increase Council Tax Bills because of diseconomies of scale; and*
- 3. delay or halt entirely both the Town Council and any new Council's response to Climate Change and investment in new and improved facilities and services"*.

"This Council also supports the Policy & Resources Committee decision to allow officers to take such action as necessary to ensure that the detrimental impact of splitting the parish is clearly communicated to residents, partners, stakeholders and the wider public, as well as ensuring that these facts are submitted to Blaby District Council as part of the Community Governance Review consultation process".

Thank you for inviting us to make comments and representations in relation to whether any changes are required to the current arrangements. In the context of the Braunstone Town Council unanimous resolution above; this letter is Braunstone Town Council's formal response to the consultation.

In your letter you state "specifically we are considering whether there needs to be any changes to the local governance arrangements within the parish". In short, there does not need to be any changes to the local governance arrangements within the parish for the following reasons:

1. there have not been any material changes to the parish since the last Community Governance reviews in 2011 and 2014;
2. there is insufficient evidence of significant support among residents for any change;

further to the above, the Report submitted to Blaby District Council on 14th December 2021 contained reference under the paragraph "Why undertake this Community Governance Review" to "whether changes should be made to the parish boundary, for example creating a separate parish of Thorpe Astley". In summary, any proposed split of the existing Parish would result in:

3. fragmentation of Cohesion and Community Engagement;
4. a deterioration in Local Democracy and local governance; and
5. less effective and less convenient delivery of Local Services.

No Material Changes to the Parish

The guidance issued by the Communities and Local Government Department and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England refer to circumstances where there have been changes in population, or in reaction to specific or local new issues (paragraph 12).

The proposal to review the Community Governance arrangements of Braunstone Parish appeared on the agenda of Blaby District Full Council from nowhere. There has not been any significant development or population changes since the Community Governance Review in 2011, which rejected the idea of splitting Braunstone Town and Thorpe Astley into separate parishes, or the Community Governance Review in 2014, which is less than 10 years ago (it being noted that guidance is for Principal Councils to assess their areas to see if there is a need for a Community Governance Review every 10 years). Key shared local services, such as schools and GP services, remain unchanged.

There have not been any material changes to the parish since the last Community Governance reviews in 2011 and 2014.

Lack of evidence of Residents' support

Braunstone Town Council has not received any submissions or representations in respect of the need to conduct a Community Governance Review, including not having received any submissions concerning the need to form a separate Parish Council for Thorpe Astley.

Correspondence received from Blaby District Council also confirms that the District Council, as a body corporate, has not received any such submissions or representations. This was confirmed by the Leader of Blaby District Council, at the Council meeting on 14th December, in response to a question from Councillor Maxwell (Minute 190).

Had it been the case that the District Council had been in receipt of a Community Governance petition, signed by 7.5% of the electorate; or there had been material changes to the parish, such as a large scale development, since the last Community Governance Reviews in 2011 and 2014; then there would be reasonable evidence for Blaby District Council to undertake a Community Governance Review.

However, these factors do not exist and there is insufficient evidence of significant support among residents for any change.

Fragmentation of Cohesion and Community Engagement

These proposals are especially disappointing given the Town Council successfully coordinated a community response to the pandemic, has protected and enhanced services such as the Town's Library and supported essential services at Thorpe Astley Community Centre, such as the pre-school, GP Surgery and Covid vaccinations.

Following the pandemic and in a time when resources are tight, the Town Council's focus is to support our community and local groups recover, along with responding to the challenges faced by Climate Change.

Any proposal to separate the Parish will simply draw lines on maps, create more Councillors, and as a result will place greater demands on taxpayers while subjecting our residents to two separate Councils with less capacity offering lower quality and less resilient local services.

Both Braunstone Town and Thorpe Astley are covered by a well established monthly community newspaper, Braunstone Life. This is the primary vehicle for communication for community groups, those organising activities, local business advertising and Town Council communications. Therefore, a split of the Parish will result in duplication of community engagement activities.

Currently Thorpe Astley is the name of the housing estate within the settlement of Braunstone Town, which is within the Civil Parish of Braunstone. The name "Thorpe Astley" derives from the Astley family, who owned land in Braunstone from 1334 to 1404.

It is recognised that many residents of Thorpe Astley consider themselves to live in Thorpe Astley rather than Braunstone Town. Braunstone Town Council has recognised the unique identity of the area by investing in place signs at the entrances to the estate.

A settlement is different to a civil parish and doesn't necessarily carry the same name. For example, Littlethorpe and Narborough are separate settlements in a single Civic Parish, Narborough.

Blaby District Council has responsibility for place and street naming and has chosen to name the streets in Thorpe Astley as being in Braunstone Town. It is perfectly possible, and carries almost no consequences (other than record updating) to redesignate the streets in Thorpe Astley as being Thorpe Astley. Recognising a place's unique identity doesn't require changes to community governance arrangements.

Deterioration in Local Democracy and local governance

In your letter you state that "specifically we are considering whether there needs to be any changes to the local governance arrangements".

The Town Council's Auditor in 2021 reported the following "The council's response in the early stages of the pandemic coupled with the evolving arrangements put in place to manage its business going forward from March 2020 demonstrates a level of preparedness that was and remains second to none".

In 2020, the Town Council's Auditor reported "The council continues to demonstrate high standards of compliance both with regulatory requirements and the proper practices".

In 2019, the Town Council's Auditor reported "Standards of governance and financial management remain high at this Council". We could go on.

Braunstone Town Council is a well run transparent authority, which has a clear distinction of roles. Town Councillors provide strategic leadership, community leadership and determine a clear vision and priorities for the Council and the Town. Officers (the Council's Management Team being politically restricted appointments) provide evidence led advice and ensure the effective management of the authority, the implementation of its policies, priorities and capital projects, and facilitate high performing services and the efficient use of resources.

Since the first Parish elections in 1999 following the first residents moving into Thorpe Astley, there have always been Thorpe Astley residents elected as Town Councillors. Since the Town Council recommended the creation of a Thorpe Astley Town ward in the Community Governance Reviews of 2011 and 2014, this Ward has always elected residents from Thorpe Astley to be Town Councillors. The Town Councillors who are elected are those that choose to put up and those then chosen by the electorate. If others had wished to change Town Council policy or the status of Thorpe Astley then they had the opportunity through elections.

Any split to the Parish will result in less effective use of resources and a potential lower standard of local governance in both the existing and any new Council resulting in a deterioration of local democracy for all local residents in the medium to long term.

In the short term, the split will almost halt the activities of the existing and new Council in terms of responding to the needs of the communities, responding to the challenge of climate change and investment in services and assets. Upon the Order coming into force a complex negotiation on splitting of assets is likely to take place, with complex discussions and costly administrative processes being undertaken such as TUPE and transfer of land and financial assets.

Less effective and less convenient delivery of Local Services

Changes to the governance arrangements of the Parish will have a detrimental effect on both the finances and the services delivered at parish level and will

1. result in a reduction in the quality and diversity of services available to all the residents, but especially those residents in any smaller parish;
2. result in an increase Council Tax Bills because of diseconomies of scale; and
3. delay or halt entirely both the Town Council and any new Council's response to Climate Change and investment in new and improved facilities and services.

Quality and Diversity of services

Braunstone Town Council operates:

1. Two Community Centres, one in Braunstone Town and one in Thorpe Astley, these Centres share staff, equipment, IT and booking processes.
2. A Community Grants Scheme and ad-hoc grants schemes, e.g. Covid-19 Recovery; specific events.
3. Two mobile speed signs.
4. CCTV on our parks, car parks, community and sports facilities and on a footpath and underpass.
5. Partnership agreements for the provision of services at our facilities: GP Outreach Service, Nursery & Pre-School, Citizens Advice Bureau.
6. 32 hectares of land, which includes:
 - a) sports pitches, recreation grounds, nature areas, woodland (including two ancient woodlands), an orchard, meadow and a Civic Memorial Garden;
 - b) 5 main parks;
 - c) 39 parcels of public open space in residential areas;
 - d) 10 play areas;
 - e) a large nature area with woodland walks and two ancient woodlands;the Parks team have one depot and share equipment and fleet.

7. The Council has 6 car parks. 16 lighting columns (two double) in car parks. 29 public footpath lighting columns. 5 roadside street seats. 2 youth shelters. 11 place signs.

In the event of a decision to create a separate Parish Council for Thorpe Astley, many of the above services will be split, including the staff, equipment and knowledge. This will result in less resources and less resilience; which will be detrimental to the quality and variety of services being offered to all residents, but especially those residents in the smaller parish.

Increased Council Tax Bills

As mentioned earlier, a decision to create a separate Parish Council for Thorpe Astley would result in asset and liability transfer, including the TUPE of staff.

Braunstone Town Council has undertaken an initial desktop exercise in attributing budgets according to the asset and liability split, including the transfer of staff.

The impact on the precept is enclosed as an appendix.

These budgets are a best estimate, individual decisions can be made by the respective authorities, however, certain factors will apply:

1. Buildings, land, assets and services are divided based on territory and it is assumed that the parish boundary for Thorpe Astley will be the current Thorpe Astley Town Ward – i.e. west of Lubbesthorpe Way and south of Lubbesthorpe Brook. Therefore, the full cost of the Pavilion and Depot at Mossdale is met by Braunstone Town Council (a provision of half that amount is then duplicated for Thorpe Astley Parish Council, which currently doesn't have a parks depot). The full cost of the Library is attributed to Braunstone Town Council.
2. TUPE applies and the Braunstone Town/Thorpe Astley staffing split allocated in resources and operations for Parks & Open Spaces is 50/50 and for Community Centres (Receptions, Duty Officers, Cleaners & Premises) is 59/41; there would be no need for a Management Team of 3 in Braunstone Town Council and prior to the Town Council taking on Thorpe Astley services in 2010/2011, the management consisted of a Town Clerk and a Community Development and Centres Manager. Therefore, these figures assume that one management post will transfer to Thorpe Astley Parish Council. In this assumption, all Library and administrative posts stay the Braunstone Town Council.
3. All Public Works Loans are for assets in Braunstone Town and stay with Braunstone Town Council.
4. Most Corporate Management costs are either duplicated (e.g. Audit, IT Systems and Subscriptions) or slightly higher proportion of the combined cost (e.g. Insurance, IT equipment and Stationery).

During the pandemic, Braunstone Town Council sadly lost some Centres staff to redundancy. Staff whose role involved working at Thorpe Astley Community Centre. Under the terms of the Local Government Pension Scheme, the Town Council has to meet the strain costs of the three staff members who took early retirement. These strain costs will be paid for the next 7 to 8 years and will need to be divided between the separate parishes on the 59/41 Community Centres cost split.

As indicated at the Appendix, diseconomies of scale result in precept rises for residents in both Braunstone Town and Thorpe Astley. Due to the significant

difference between the size and scale of the services provided by Braunstone Town Council in Thorpe Astley and its population and tax base, Thorpe Astley residents would see an approximate increase in their tax bills of 15 to 16% in 2022/2023, compared to 2021/2022. Braunstone Town residents would see an increase of 9 to 10% in 2022/2023 compared to 2021/2022. The actual increase this year is 5.66%.

It must be reiterated that the figures enclosed at the Appendix are initial desktop figures based on the current tax base and the budgets approved for 2022/2023. Nevertheless, Thorpe Astley with 26% of the Parish Precept Base will obtain responsibility for one of the Parish's two community centres and half of the Parish's Parks, Open Spaces and Playgrounds, including the staffing resources, hence there will be a significant increase in council tax bills.

Impact on Projects and Investment

The Council has significant ongoing projects, which will be limited, delayed or even cancelled as a result of a split to the Parish:

- responding to the ongoing Climate Change agenda;
- completion of the Shakespeare Park Improvement Project;
- establishing the arrangements for the sports clubs to manage the new Pavilion at Shakespeare Park, along with supporting initiatives to increase sports and sport participation at the site;
- the importance of assisting the community and community groups to recover following the Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of enhancing social inclusion and reducing isolation;
- the need to encourage use and users at Thorpe Astley Community Centre following Covid-19 and its use as a vaccination venue;
- delivering enhancement plans to the toilet facilities at Braunstone Civic Centre, including the installation of a Changing Places toilet facility, as well as improvements to the kitchen facility to enable the Civic Community Lounge to be enhanced as a café/meeting place; and
- transfer of Thorpe Astley Park and proposed new Meridian Park to the Council's ownership and management (in the case of Meridian Park the District Planning decision did not provide for any commuted sums).

Both diseconomies of scale, less resilience and capacity within the workforce and preoccupation in 2023/2024 with splitting assets and TUPE and undertaking the associated legal and administrative work will put the delivery of these projects and improvements in jeopardy.

Conclusions

In the absence of any significant support from electors across Braunstone Town, including Thorpe Astley, and no significant population or other changes locally, this review was generated out of nowhere by Blaby District Council, who put the decision straight to its full assembly without detailed examination, detailed officer advice or scrutiny.

In a press release issued by the District Council on 18th January 2022, the Leader of Blaby District Council is quoted as saying "we feel this is the right time to hear views from those living in Braunstone Town and Thorpe Astley".

Clearly creating a separate Parish for Thorpe Astley will result in poorer quality and less resilience services and significant higher costs to tax payers across both Braunstone Town and Thorpe Astley. Such a decision would also break up a dedicated staff team and efficient body which has high standards of governance and financial management and has the capacity and ability to respond to the challenges of our time and deliver high quality improvements and investment. Is this price worth paying because, rather than seeking advice, gathering evidence, being open to the arguments and making a balanced judgement on the merits, the Leader of the District Council “feels” this is the right time?

Therefore, Braunstone Town Council calls on Blaby District Council to ensure that any future recommendation to split the existing parish and create new parish of Thorpe Astley should be shown to have the support of the majority of electors across Braunstone Parish and will receive due consideration at Blaby District Council in a meeting where Officers can present the information and answer questions and any decision can be effectively scrutinised, prior to a final decision being made by the Council.

If you wish to clarify any matters set out in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Darren Tilley', written in dark ink.

Darren Tilley
Chief Executive & Town Clerk

APPENDIX – Estimated impact on overall budget and Council Tax Precept of creating a separate parish of Thorpe Astley.

CURRENT PARISH OF BRAUNSTONE: approved 2022/23 budget: £720,356.

COUNCIL TAX BANDS	A (6/9)	B (7/9)	C (8/9)	D (9/9)	E (11/9)	F (13/9)
NUMBER OF PROPERTIES IN EACH BAND (January 2022)	921	3707	1538	731	224	3
SCALED CHARGES FOR 2022/2023	£98.25	£114.63	£131.00	£147.38	£180.13	£212.88
Charges in 2021/2022	£92.99	£108.49	£123.99	£139.49	£170.49	£201.49
Cash Increase	£5.26	£6.14	£7.01	£7.89	£9.64	£11.39

Percentage increase on 2021/2022: 5.66%

PARISH OF BRAUNSTONE TOWN (Millfield, Ravenhurst & Fosse and Winstanley)
2022/23 budget: £549,138.

COUNCIL TAX BANDS	A (6/9)	B (7/9)	C (8/9)	D (9/9)	E (11/9)	F (13/9)
NUMBER OF PROPERTIES IN EACH BAND	903	3151	1119	265	39	2
ANNUAL PAYMENT	£102.11	£119.13	£136.15	£153.17	£187.21	£221.25

Percentage increase on 2021/2022: 9.81%

PARISH OF THORPE ASTLEY 2022/23 budget: £210,129.

COUNCIL TAX BANDS	A (6/9)	B (7/9)	C (8/9)	D (9/9)	E (11/9)	F (13/9)
NUMBER OF PROPERTIES IN EACH BAND	18	556	419	466	185	1
ANNUAL PAYMENT	£107.55	£125.47	£143.40	£161.32	£197.17	£233.02

Percentage increase on 2021/2022: 15.65%

These budgets are a best estimate, individual decisions can be made by the respective authorities, however, certain factors will apply:

- *Buildings, land, assets and services are divided based on territory;*
- *TUPE applies and the Braunstone Town/Thorpe Astley staffing split allocated in resources and operations for Parks & Open Spaces is 50/50 and for Community Centres (Receptions, Duty Officers, Cleaners & Premises) is 59/41; there would be no need for a Management Team of 3 in Braunstone Town Council and prior to the Town Council taking on Thorpe Astley services in 2010/2011, the management consisted two employees.*
- *All Public Works Loans are for assets in Braunstone Town.*
- *Most Corporate Management costs are either duplicated (e.g. Audit, IT Systems and Subscriptions) or slightly higher proportion of the combined cost (e.g. Insurance, IT equipment and Stationery).*