

**A village in the heart of Cheshire**

# SAVE OUR SOMERFORD

Further information provided by Somerford Parish Council

## 1. What exactly is proposed by CEBC?

The CEBC Community Governance Review Draft Recommendations covering the whole Borough can be viewed here: <https://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s84154/Draft%20Proposals%20%20Final%20Publication%20Version%20March%202021%20with%20220321%20amends%20V2.pdf>

The part of the document dealing with the Congleton area, including Somerford, can be viewed at pages 104 – 112 incl.

At page 104 it states: *The parish of Congleton has expanded and is due to expand further to the north, into the present parishes of Eaton, Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths and Somerford, and it is proposed that these areas should be transferred to the parish of Congleton.* (**Comment:** This is factually inaccurate; the parish of Congleton has NOT expanded and it will only expand into adjoining parishes if residents do not vote against it.)

It further states, at page 105: *Local Plan Strategy site LPS 26 is a major new housing development which is partly within Somerford, but which is adjacent to the existing urban development in Congleton and is a consequence of that town's expansion. There is also a significant existing housing overspill from Congleton into Somerford. Moving these areas into the parish of Congleton would reflect these expansions and would bring all of LPS 26 and the existing housing overspill within Congleton. Map 8a ('Congleton') and Map 34 ('Somerford') in Appendix 5 show the extent of the area that would be transferred (the orange shaded 'potential expansion area' within the parish of Somerford).* (**Comment:** LPS26 is almost entirely in the parish of Somerford, only a very small area, principally the Turnstone Grange & Seddon developments, being in Congleton.)

It goes on to state: *The proposed northern boundary of the parish of Congleton is shown in Map 8a ('Congleton') in Appendix 5. Much of this boundary will follow the Congleton Link Road (CLR), and attempts have been made to use clearly identifiable physical boundaries (including existing roads and the River Dane) for the remainder.* (**Comment:** It is significant that the boundary follows the CLR until it reaches that part of Somerford at which the only large residential development north of the CLR is to be located and it then reverts to the traditional boundary of the River Dane. It might be remembered that CEBC Local Plan originally stated that no development north of the CLR would be allowed. That promise was then broken, requiring an urgent amendment to the Local Plan.)

The proposal is for 5 new 'wards' to be created in the enlarged Congleton Town as opposed to the existing 2 ward system. Somerford would be placed in Ward 4, provisionally named South West, with 5 councillors for 5,791 electors (equalling 1 councillor per 1158.2 electors at 2025 figures) out of a total of 22 councillors. The document indicates that, as at 2018, Somerford has 7 councillors for 713 electors, equalling 1 councillor per 101.9 electors. (**Comment:** Even assuming a doubling of electors in Somerford by 2025, the ratio would still only be 1 councillor per 204 electors. Further the 7 councillors of Somerford equal 100% of the vote in the parish whereas 5 councillors in the new South West ward would command less than 23% of the voting capacity in Congleton.)

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The section dealing with Somerford alone is at page 112 and states:

## **SOMERFORD**

*The current governance arrangements are as follows:*

*Councillor no. 7 - Electors (2018) 713 - Ratio of electors per councillor (2018) 101.9*

*The proposed boundary change with the parish of Congleton will reduce the electorate of Somerford to 107 electors (2025). At this level, the parish cannot be viable as a separate parish.*

*The Borough Council is anxious to hear the views of the public and interested bodies on the merger of the remainder of Somerford parish with the parish of Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths.*

*Reference should be made to the section on Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths for the implications of such a merger with that parish. In that section it is suggested that a parish council of seven seats would be appropriate to represent the 387 electors of the merged parish (2025 electorate). This would mean a ratio of 55.3 electors per councillor. (Comment: The boundary between Somerford and Somerford Booths is the line of the River Dane Somerford with no crossing point within the conjoined parishes. Those who reside in that part of the parish which is not proposed to be moved into Congleton Town might wish make representations to the effect that a merger with Brereton would be preferred. However, we would hope that they would express an overriding wish to maintain the status quo of living in Somerford.)*

## **2. What does the parish council propose should happen?**

The Somerford Parish Council is unanimously opposed to the proposals and hope to persuade their parishioners to overwhelmingly state their preference to remain as an independent parish represented by elected members of the community by ticking the 'Disagree' box on the response form.

The principal guidance document concerning boundary reviews makes it clear that:

- (i) the review should consider the information it has received in the form of expressions of local opinion on the matters considered by the review, representations made by local people and other interested persons, and also use its own knowledge of the local area.**
- (ii) a recommendation to abolish or establish a parish council, may negatively impact on community cohesion, either within the proposed parish area, or in the wider community within which it would be located, and therefore should not be made.**
- (iii) the Government expects to see a trend in the creation, rather than the abolition, of parishes.**
- (iv) the abolition of parishes should not be undertaken unless clearly justified. Any decision a principal council may make on whether to abolish a parish should not be taken lightly.**
- (v) In future, principal councils will wish to consider the sort of principles identified above in arriving at their decisions on whether or not to abolish a parish council. In doing so, they will be aware that decisions about community governance arrangements, including decisions for the abolition of a parish council, may attract a challenge by way of judicial review.**
- (vi) The 2006 white paper underlined the Government's commitment to parish councils as an established and valued form of neighbourhood democracy with an important role to play in both rural, and increasingly urban, areas.**

The draft proposals make no reference whatsoever to local opinion, community cohesion, neighbourhood democracy and do not claim any justification beyond administrative convenience. The proposal appears to be based solely on the basis of the newly created physical boundary created by the CLR. It argues that all areas within the CLR should transfer to Congleton Town. However, it belies that argument by including an area of Somerford which extends beyond the CLR to include an area which is predominantly rural but which includes a site which the amended local plan designated for residential development. The result of this is to impose the proposed extended boundary of Congleton Town between the rural 'rump' of Somerford and the parish with which it is proposed to be merged. This can best be seen on the map on page 5. The boundary line which remains is the River Dane with no crossing point within the conjoined parishes.

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Indeed, the parish council were encouraged by CEBC to raise any relevant boundary issues at an early stage and two such issues were raised. These were:

- (i) A proposal that the review body should consider the 64 dwellings presently located within the parish of Brereton which front or which directly and solely connect with the A54 Holmes Chapel Road, a road solely within the parish of Somerford, via side roads off the A54, be re-located within the parish of Somerford. This proposal was wholly ignored within the officer’s report. In order to support this proposition, it is intended to write to the occupiers of the residences affected to ask whether they would support the re-drawing of the boundary to give effect to that view.
- (ii) A proposal that all those properties presently under construction on a site adjacent to Back Lane known as Turnstone Grange being developed by Miller Homes should be moved into the parish of Somerford on the basis that the development was immediately adjacent to the Radnor Green development currently subject to a reserved matters application by Stewart Milne Ltd., which development is wholly within the parish of Somerford and the two developments will be largely indistinguishable one from the other. Further, the site has been promoted since inception as being “*Located in the aspirational parish of Somerford, Turnstone Grange is a new development of 2, 3- and 4-bedroom homes featuring our most popular housetype designs.*” Again, this proposal was wholly ignored within the officer’s report. In order to support this proposition, it is intended to write to the occupiers of the residences affected and to the developer/builder to ask whether they would support the re-drawing of the boundary to give effect to that view.

### 3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed move into Congleton Town?

We have yet to identify any advantages which are meaningful in any way. The majority of the services provided to the residents of Cheshire East are provided by the Borough Council. This will not change. It is true that the residents of Somerford rely on the Town for the provision of privately provided services, such as shops, schools, health centres and the like but again, that would not change. Certainly the residents of Congleton would benefit from the merger since the parish precept paid by Somerford residents would go directly into the coffers of Congleton Town Council and could help to finance the town’s infrastructure and services. But whereas 100% of what is currently paid by Somerford residents is spent in Somerford, how much of that money would be spent in Somerford by Congleton Town Council?

Some of the disadvantages have already been mentioned – reduced representation, loss of identity and community cohesion, loss of sense of place – as Miller Homes put it, Somerford residents are “*located in an aspirational parish*”. Oh, and did we mention the extra cost to Somerford residents of a move into Congleton Town? An increase of over 28% – for what? See the current figures below:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
<b>CONGLETON</b>	60.73	70.85	80.97	91.09	111.33	131.57	151.82	182.18
<b>SOMERFORD</b>	43.54	50.80	58.05	65.31	79.82	94.34	108.85	130.62

### 4. What has the parish council achieved over the last 5 years?

- ▶ **Persuaded the RSPB to donate 10 acres of prime agricultural land, worth at least £7M in development value, to the parish thus saving the land from the certainty of housing development.**
- ▶ **Raised over £150,000 in sponsorship and donations to create the Rhead’s Meadows Nature Park on that land.**
- ▶ **Agreed with the Cheshire Wildlife Trust a 99-year lease on Blackfirs Wood with the intention of retaining and improving it as a valuable local resource.**
- ▶ **Secured s.106 funding for improvements to the wildlife ponds at Blackfirs Wood.**

- ▶ **Committed to invest £10K over the next two years to improve the visitor experience at Blackfirs Wood.**
- ▶ **Worked with the CEBC and their main contractors, Graham, to ensure that the design features of the Congleton Link Road wherever possible benefit residents and to ensure the construction phase impacts upon them as little as possible**
- ▶ **Working with all the major housebuilders in the parish (Bovis, Anwyl, Barratt David Wilson, Bellway) to ensure that their developments are completed in accordance with plans and conditions.**
- ▶ **Persistent lobbying of Cheshire East Highways (CEH) to secure improvements on local roads.**
- ▶ **Persisted in the face of CEBC resistance to secure a 40-mph speed limit on much of Holmes Chapel Road (A54) and placing a speed indicator/recording sign on that road.**
- ▶ **Persuaded CEH (i) to extend the 40-mph speed limit to cover the whole of Blackfirs Lane and much of Chelford Road; (ii) to improve the design of the junction of those two roads to reduce speed; and (iii) to extend the pavement at the Back Lane roundabout to avoid pedestrians having to cross 3 roads rather than one.**

## **5. Are there any other factors to consider?**

Somerford Parish Council has proved its worth on the national stage. Earlier this year it was able to issue the following press release:

*“**Somerford Parish Council** is very pleased and proud to announce that they have once again been awarded **Quality Gold** under the **Local Council Award Scheme**. We were first awarded Quality Gold in August 2016 under this most prestigious scheme and at that time we were one of only three holders in Cheshire – **to date there are still only five Cheshire parishes which hold the award and just fifty parishes in the whole of England**. The Quality Gold Award demonstrates that a council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and council development. In announcing this award, we pay tribute to the hard work and commitment over the last 12 years of our then clerk, Julie Mason, who was recently appointed as Clerk to the Bollington Town Council, and welcome our new Clerk, Carlton Evans, who will be working hard to maintain the excellent standards for which Somerford Parish has become known.”*

The response of Cheshire East Borough Council? – Abolish it!

## **6. Where can I get more information?**

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England published a Guidance on community governance reviews to principal councils in March 2010 which can be viewed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/8312/1527635.pdf) - CEBC must have mislaid their copy!

Two parish councils (Britwell and Wexham Court) sought a Judicial Review of a decision by their unitary authority, Slough Borough Council, to abolish them both. The justification put forward by Slough was concern at the way both councils had been run over a number of years. The detailed law report makes for interesting reading for those so minded and can be read here:

<https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2019/998.html>

## **SUMMARY OF THE VIEW OF THE PARISH COUNCIL**

The parish of Somerford engenders a strong sense of community identity and cohesion and the best way to demonstrate this is for residents to not only respond to any consultation process held by the principal authority but also by responding to requests for support from the parish council and by organising their own neighbourhood petitions, perhaps on an estate basis, in support of remaining within the parish of Somerford. It will be a strong argument to demonstrate that it is not only those who have lived in the parish

for many years who wish to retain their identity, but that those who have moved into newly developed parts of the parish in recent years share that identity.

As regards the proposed merger of the remaining part of Somerford with Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths parishes, it seems to us that it would be far more logical to merge it into Brereton Parish since many of the houses along the west side of Holmes Chapel Road are already within that parish and the CE Ward Councillor covers both areas. (See paragraph 2(i) above.)

## Map

The map below shows that part of Somerford proposed by Cheshire East to be moved into Congleton Town shaded in a buff colour and cross-hatched. The shaded area to the right (east) is that part of Hulme Walfield & Somerford Booths (HW&SB) also proposed to be moved into Congleton Town. The unshaded area to the left (west) of the cross-hatched area is that part of Somerford proposed to be moved into HW&SB. The current northern parish boundary line running from bottom right (south east) of the map diagonally to the top left (north west) follows the line of the River Dane.

