

## ***From a Residents' to a Community Association***

The purpose of this short document is to engage you in thinking about the possible future of the Poundbury Residents Association. One of the options is to develop a broader based ***Poundbury Community Association established as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)***. This has been a recurring theme within the Big Poundbury Conversation and seems to command some interest and support. We are now at a stage where we wish to explore this in more detail and we would like to hear what you think.

There are 5 sections to this document and at the end of each section there is a question for you. We would like to hear from you before **January 24<sup>th</sup>** (the date for the next general meeting). Please read the paper through first and then either email your general views to [bigconversation@lovepoundbury.org](mailto:bigconversation@lovepoundbury.org) or use the following link to respond to some short questions on line: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FuturePRA>

### ***Section one - Why change at all?***

The current activities of the Residents' Association include:

- communication of events, news and developments through the LovePoundbury website <https://lovepoundbury.org/>
- the organisation of certain social events (e.g. new resident welcome meetings and events like the Table Top events)
- the representation of residents to the Duchy and others on issues that seem to be of most significance.
- Providing a point for information for those externally having an interest in Poundbury (e.g. the Press and visitors)
- The initiation and management of community development initiatives (e.g. the Big Poundbury Conversation)

There is a formal membership of 520 households (out of approximately 2,300 total) and an email reach of over 900 individuals. There is some available money in the bank (£7,500) but there is no annual membership fee and no recurring source of income. The Association cannot seek grants from other organisations for community development work and it does not have the legal structure to own property or employ. The PRA has a much improved web site but no physical presence or centre. Finally, all members of the Committee are volunteers and owing to changes in their personal circumstances there have been 2 changes of Chair this year and there are continued vacancies. The Big Poundbury Conversation initiative has attracted some additional volunteers as part of a working group, but this is a project based commitment and resource.

The Big Poundbury Conversation has generated an agenda that might be seen to be beyond the current remit of the PRA and beyond it's current capability. The Conversation has engaged over 800 people and has enabled a clear expression of the positives of living and working in Poundbury, of which there are many.

The Conversation has also highlighted challenges and opportunities including recurring issues of **the quality of some of the build and infrastructure** ( windows, rendering, pavements), **road safety** (speeds and parking), desires for **a safer and greener Poundbury** (clean streets and parks, more planting and access to allotments, addressing anti-social behaviour, the development of renewable sources of energy, a focus on cycling), and **greater social integration** (sharing what exists currently in terms of groups and activities whilst also developing enhanced activities for young and old, potentially in new facilities like a community hub).

Addressing many of these issues and opportunities would require a more systematic integration of effort across current volunteer groups, across resident and business populations and greater integration with Dorchester services and resources. Some of the solutions might require investment in facilities and services to be supported by an enhanced volunteer base combined with some employment. **The PRA is not geared to meeting these challenges and opportunities.**

One option is to move from the current Resident's Association that involves residents, but in practice, seems to be less inclusive of those who rent particularly those who rent from Housing Associations. It also does not really involve businesses and other organisations who have a stake in Poundbury. Nor does it involve those who come to work here. Each of these groups will have a different set of needs and preoccupations but share the same environment and overall resource, and, have a common interest in developing a thriving community.

A move to a broader based and inclusive Community Association might bring the following benefits:

1. If properly designed, it would be more inclusive of all who live and work in Poundbury
2. If the structure is formalised and given Charitable Status (Charitable Incorporated Organisation -ICO) it could attract grants to undertake community development and to provide additional services
3. Such status would provide a more rigorous approach to governance and management of activities ensuring that there is a proper democratic and accountable approach to community development
4. A more inclusive association would provide an opportunity to integrate the perspectives, skills and resources of the community for the benefit of all
5. A more formal structure would aid communication- members of the community would know who to contact about what.
6. A more inclusive association will have more legitimacy in influencing statutory decision making (Local Authorities, Health Services and the Duchy as regulator)

**1. Question to you – Do you think we need to change from the current PRA arrangement and why? How would you improve the current arrangements? Would you favour developing a new Community Association?**

## **Section 2 – The option of establishing a broader based Community Association**

A proposal to establish a new Community Association would have to clearly set out the following:

- a) The purpose of the Association (its Object). This is important as it gives overall direction for the detailed activities and has a legal implication too, especially in situations where there might be concern that any activity is outside of the original reason for being established.
- b) The actual membership- who is eligible to be a member.
- c) How the Association is structured – who is accountable, how things get done and who things are decided.
- d) How the Association is financed and, in particular, whether there should be a membership fee.

Beyond these questions there is a fair bit of detail that underpins the actual operation; for example, how leaders get elected, how meetings are organised, what happens when the extraordinary occurs. But at this stage we want to engage you in a discussion of the points above.

### **The Purpose of the Association (It's Object).**

A starting point for this might be to adopt the following overall purpose or object:

***'To encourage and facilitate the development of a strong, thriving and inclusive community in Poundbury'.***

Something like this would enable a broad range of community activities including the following:

- The gathering and dissemination of information on the needs of the community, the planning of activities and services to fill gaps and the organisation of new activities.
- The raising of funds through membership fees, grants and trading activities
- The ownership or leasing of facilities such as a Community Hub if desired.
- The representation and advocacy of the community to other organisations on issues of significance (for example in liaising with the Duchy, the Council, the local Policy and Public Services)
- The management and operation of a comprehensive web site and potentially a physical community centre (hub)
- The employment of staff to administer and provide services to work alongside our volunteer base as part of a trading arm.

***2. Question for you- do you think the statement above (the purpose or the object) is the right one? What would you suggest? What would you see as potential activities of the Association?***

### ***Section 3. The Membership***

To be more inclusive a new Community Association could include the following as members:

1. All residents who own property in Poundbury including all forms of ownership (full equity and shared)
2. All residents who rent property but do not own and who might be here for different time periods
3. All individuals who work in Poundbury as individual members

In addition, there could be corporate membership where organisations have a formal association. These could include:

4. Housing associations as corporate members
5. All business owners as corporate members
6. The PiP, Brownsword Hall, the Quiet Space and the Community Church as Corporate Members
7. The MANCOs as Corporate Member
8. The Duchy as a Corporate Member
9. Schools and Voluntary Organisations as corporate members

We need to be clear about who is eligible and who is not. There could be of course different levels of membership (full membership as opposed to 'supporter' or 'associate members'). It will be important that members feel a common agenda and a common stake in the community. If the definition is too broad, then this will dilute the notion of community leading to division or competition.

***3. Question to you – Who do you think should be eligible for membership to achieve the overall purpose and object of the Association? What levels of membership might we consider and why?***

### ***Section 4 - How we are structured and how we discuss and take decisions?***

The PRA has a formal committee and a commitment to 4 general meetings per year, one of which is the AGM where officers (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) and committee members are elected. Much of the work is actually undertaken on a voluntary basis either by members of the Committee or other volunteers who work individually or as part of sub-committees or working groups.

A Community Association with a broader remit and larger budget would require a much more formal leadership (governance) commitment. This could be provided by a Board of Trustees numbering for example 6-8 people with the requisite expertise and perspectives,

taking formal responsibility and accountability for the affairs of the Association. These Trustees can be drawn from the community but could also be enhanced by some appointments from outside. The Board of Trustees would be responsible for the overall direction of the Association, for ensuring that it operates within its stated objective, lives within budget and conforms to standards and policies. These individuals would be volunteers and not paid. They would be there to oversee but not actually do. A new Board of Trustees would have a Chair. The terms of office for Trustees could be 3 years with a limit on how many terms they can have. Trustees would be appointed by the members through an agreed process.

The actual work of the Association could be addressed in more detail by a Coordinating committee or group. This group could be of a similar size to the Board of Trustees with volunteer officers having more specific responsibilities. These roles might correspond to functions (for example Event Management, Managing the Volunteer Resource, Communications, Fundraising, managing specific facilities) and there may be specific projects or initiatives. The activities and projects might be organised within themes such as Health and Well Being, Children and Families, Arts and Culture, the Environment and be led by those with relevant and appropriate expertise. The Coordinating Committee becomes the engine room of the Association, organising and facilitating members who volunteer.

There might in turn be separate arrangements for the undertaking of trading activities that in turn assume the employment of staff.

Away from the leadership there would be a process of meetings to engage the membership in the work of the Association. There can be a formal commitment to a given number of general meetings per year with the provision of an Annual General Meeting to review progress, the sign off accounts and to make appointments. There might also be a more informal and emergent set of meetings or working processes dependent upon need (like the processes that have been used as part of the current Big Poundbury Conversation initiative).

Whatever the leadership and working arrangements, the design should ensure:

- Accountability and control for key areas of operation
- Timely decision making in a non-bureaucratic way
- That we do not make unreasonable assumptions about the time and commitment of a predominantly volunteer resource
- That the membership always feel that this is their organisation and not being dominated by those with specific interests

***4. Question to you- how would you structure the Association? How would you ensure that members can participate effectively and feel a sense of ownership? How should leaders be elected or appointed?***

## **Section 5. Membership Fees**

The final question relates to the issue of whether there is a membership fee and if so, what kind of fee might be charged to whom and how.

In the first instance the scale of operation for a Community Association might not be too financially demanding. There will be costs associated with the on-going operation for example fees for accounting services, for meetings and for some part time administrative support. There will be costs associated with communications and the development and management of the website. These total costs could be around £10-15,000 per year.

The budget would increase as new community projects come on stream funded through grants. If we have a community hub or manage a particular facility, then there will be costs associated with management and the delivery of some services. So it might be that the budget for an Association would increase to be funded through a mix of grants and income from services, fundraising and possibly corporate sponsorship. But the fixed cost of operation (our web site, leadership processes, meetings and administrative support) will need to be maintained financially on an on-going basis. These costs become our fixed overhead and could be supported by a membership fee.

There is also a strong argument for an annual membership fee to enable a keen sense of ownership by members of the work of the Association with some legitimacy of expectation about what is done and not.

Leaving aside the actual fee, we need to take a view on whether in principle there should be a fee, and if so, how that might apply to households and corporate members. For the purposes of discussion, we should be mindful of the number of households (2033 across all forms of tenure) businesses (180) and staff (2000).

***5. Question to you- do you think that we should charge an annual membership fee? If you do, how much should that be and how might it be collected? Should there be different charges for different groups or a scale of charge? Finally, what would persuade people to join and pay a fee?***

Thanks for giving this attention. Now we want to know what you think. You can communicate your general views by emailing [bigconversation@lovepoundbury.org](mailto:bigconversation@lovepoundbury.org) or use the link to complete a short questionnaire ( 9 questions taking a total of 10 minutes max to complete)

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FuturePRA>