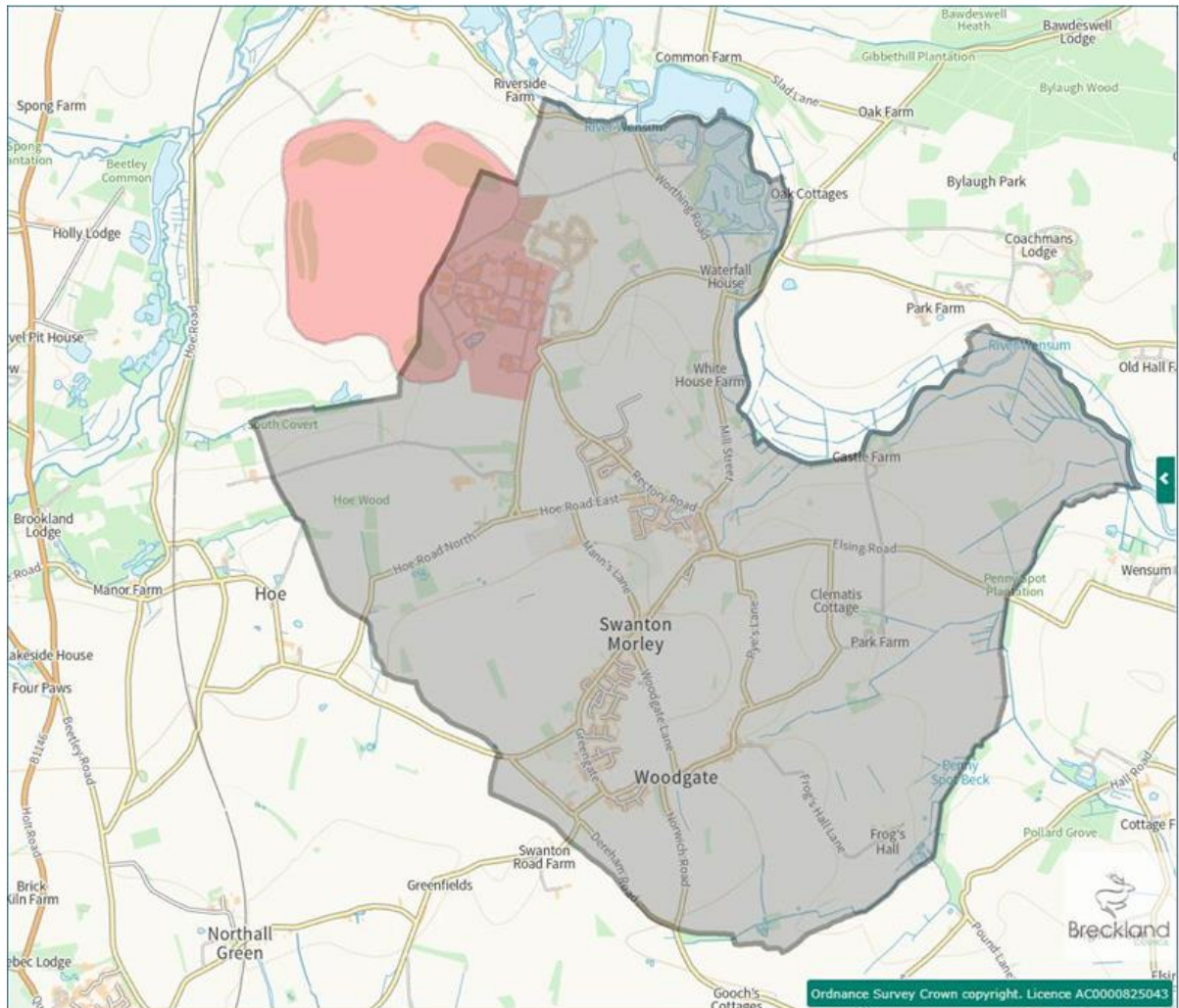


SWANTON MORLEY PARISH COUNCIL

PROPOSED COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW MARCH 2025



Map 1

Background

In November 2016 the Ministry of Defence announced the outcome of its comprehensive and long-term approach to what is needed from the Defence estate. This strategy is principally aimed at improving military capability. Robertson Barracks was identified within the document 'A Better Defence Estate' as being surplus to future requirement and scheduled for disposal, although not until 2031. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation has engaged with Breckland Council, Swanton Morley Parish Council and Hoe & Worthing Parish Meeting about its desire for this site to become a strategic development site with up to 2000 new homes. Whilst any speculative development would be the subject of a local development plan review, the spectre of the base closing and its future use has provoked much debate on what this would mean for the village of Swanton Morley. One point of concern is the fact that the Parish Boundary of Swanton Morley currently incorporates only the existing developed part of the site, with the remainder of the site located within the Parish of Hoe and Worthing (most of the undeveloped grass airfield). Most residents will likely not be aware of this fact especially as the site was known for decades as RAF Swanton Morley.

Proposal

Swanton Morley Parish Council is seeking a Community Governance Review (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) to consider changing the existing parish boundary to include all of the Robertson Barracks site including the airfield as shown on Map 1 (page 1). The Parish Council believes that there are a number of positive aspects to this application and these are set out as follows:-

1. Swanton Morley has a Neighbourhood Plan which was adopted in 2019. The development policies contained within this plan only apply to the area within the existing parish boundary. The policies do not currently apply to the airfield part of the site which currently sits within the parish boundary of Hoe & Worthing. The whole site lends itself to a mixed use development retaining many of the current technical buildings to provide small business premises and employment opportunities as well as additional housing. To retain these buildings for such use would most likely result in current green spaces such as some or all of the airfield being developed. Swanton Morley Parish Council believes that incorporating the whole of the Robertson Barracks site within the parish boundary of Swanton Morley will provide greater planning protection to the whole site through the implementation of its Neighbourhood Plan policies and in doing so provide more local planning policies benefitting residents of nearby Hoe & Worthing.
2. If the Robertson Barracks site is developed in the future, the majority of traffic to and from it, including construction traffic will inevitably travel through Swanton Morley village. If Swanton Morley residents are to be subjected to this, it is the strong belief of the Parish Council that the tax base for the whole site should be allocated to Swanton Morley. This would allow Swanton Morley

Parish Council to account for this new tax base in its own precept calculations. The income generated for the village could be used to improve local amenities and fund small infrastructure projects. Currently, if the airfield is developed, Swanton Morley residents would be expected to endure any impacts of the new development and at the same time the extra council tax proceeds would go to Hoe & Worthing Parish Meeting. A successful CGR would rectify this situation.

3. The existing Grade II listed Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) is historically significant. Prime Minister, Winston Churchill and General Eisenhower stood there on 4th July 1942 to watch the first joint allied bombing raid of Germany leave these shores. Swanton Morley Parish Councillors have expressed an interest in retaining this building once Robertson Barracks ceases to be a military establishment. It has a lot of potential to possibly be turned into a museum commemorating the military history of the base. This would obviously require a lot of thought in the future but any such ambition is not currently realistic given that the existing parish boundary runs through the middle of the ATCT site. Having the whole site within the parish of Swanton Morley would allow the Parish Council to consider committing future time and financial resources to this ambition as well as providing a clear ownership boundary for whoever owns it in the future.



Swanton Morley Air Traffic Control Tower - Picture courtesy of UK Airfields

4. Swanton Morley Parish Council seeks **only** to change the existing land boundary between the village of Swanton Morley and Hoe & Worthing. It does not seek to change the existing governance arrangements for either itself or Hoe & Worthing Parish Meeting. The latter only recently made it clear that it wants to carry on being a Parish Meeting and Swanton Morley Parish Council very much respects this and would wish for this to continue. The proposed amendment to the Swanton Morley parish boundary does not affect any household or landowner as no houses exist within the curtilage of the area to be extended shown in pink on Map 1. The whole of the Robertson Barracks site is currently owned by the Ministry of Defence.
5. Under this proposal, Hoe & Worthing parish will still retain a very sizeable agricultural 'buffer zone' between its householders and the Robertson Barracks site
6. The proposed change to the parish boundary does not affect the Breckland Council or Norfolk County Council wards as the area shown in pink on Map 1 sits within the existing ward boundaries.
7. Having the whole of the Robertson Barracks site within the parish boundary of Swanton Morley will allow Swanton Morley Parish Council, as a well run and well resourced organisation, to provide the strong and stable leadership and clear communication needed to work with all stakeholders in the years ahead and guide the community in the future transition of the site from a military base to whatever its future may hold.
8. The proposal to alter the current parish boundary does not seek to predetermine any future planning applications for the Robertson Barracks site. It does however give Swanton Morley residents more clarity about the whole site and its Parish Council's ability to act on their behalf around its future especially when it comes to its Neighbourhood Plan. Ultimately, if the airfield is never developed it will remain as a field, just one that sits inside a different parish boundary.

Conclusion

For all of the reasons set out above, Swanton Morley Parish Council is of the view that it has a compelling case for a Community Governance Review to be granted. It looks forward to making this case at a future Breckland Council General Purposes Committee meeting.

10th March 2025