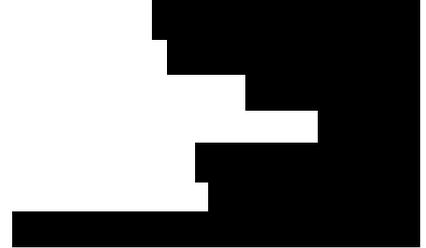


GREAT CORNARD PARISH COUNCIL



Council Manager
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Response to the Draft Recommendations on the New Electoral Arrangements for Babergh District Council

Introduction

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has published its draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements for Babergh District Council (BDC). The consultation period has already opened and closes on 11th December 2017. As was anticipated by Great Cornard Parish Council (GCPC), implementation of the draft proposals will have a knock-on effect on parish ward boundaries, which we deplore.

Council Size

The increase of one member from the 31 the LGBCE was 'minded to recommend' to the 32 members in the draft recommendations is to be welcomed. On the whole, this seems to have improved the proposals for the district's rural wards. GCPC particularly welcomes the warding arrangements for Chilton, which was in danger of becoming the parish in the West of the district that nobody wanted. However, a reduction from 43 to 32 members is still a 25.58% decrease, which should have been – and should still be – seen as a 'major change in council size' warranting a public consultation. Yet the Draft Recommendations contain no justification for the omission of a public enquiry and (paragraph 25) refer only obliquely to our concerns.

While the draft number of 32 members may have improved the situation for our rural wards, it has left our urban areas in a poor state. Having been abolished as Babergh's only 3-member ward in 2003, Hadleigh is once again to be a 3-member ward, the retrograde step we had feared. Worse still, Great Cornard, which has never been a 3-member ward, will become a 3-member ward under these proposals. We believe that this change will cause wholly unnecessary confusion in the public mind. It remains our view that a size of around 36 members would have enabled satisfactory warding arrangements for our urban areas, Sudbury, Great Cornard and Hadleigh, while allowing satisfactory warding arrangements for our rural parishes.

District Warding Arrangements for Great Cornard

The LGBCE is not recommending GCPC's preferred option of 4 members for Great Cornard in two wards, North and South, as at present. However, neither does the LGBCE wholly respect the principles GCPC set out for its fall-back option of district representation by 3 members. Leaving aside for now the question of whether Great Cornard should be represented by three district councillors in one 3-member ward (LGBCE draft recommendations) or in three single-member wards (GCPC's fall back option), we wish to draw fresh attention to the first part of our first principle:

Great Cornard has a strong local identity and deserves respect as the second-largest population centre in the Babergh district. No district wards should be created which cross the parish boundaries between Great Cornard and our neighbours, either in Sudbury or in the rural villages to the South and East of us.

In paragraph 51, the draft recommendations appear to accept the argument of GCPC's *Response to the Electoral Review of Babergh District Council* 'against dividing the parish or placing it in a ward with Little Cornard'. In paragraph 53, the draft recommendations appear further to be 'persuaded by the community evidence submitted' by GCPC of Great Cornard's 'Community Interests and Identity' and are 'recommending a draft three-member Great Cornard ward based on the parish'.

Bizarrely, however, paragraph 53 goes on to say, 'with the exclusion of electors around Cat's (*sic*) Lane'. Paragraph 52 attempts to provide the justification for this 'exclusion'. It is as a result of 'our visit to the area' and is intended 'to reflect access routes and ensure better electoral equality in Sudbury South and Great Cornard'.

Cats Lane

When GCPC first discussed the draft recommendations, one locally-born parish councillor exclaimed, 'But Cats Lane is one of the oldest roads in Great Cornard!'

- History, Community and Names

When Babergh District Council came into existence in 1974, the boundary between the parish of Great Cornard in what had been the Melford Rural District and the town of Sudbury, the successor town council to Sudbury Borough Council, was considerably closer to the centre of Sudbury than it is now. Most of the residential properties in Cornard Road (B1508) were in Great Cornard and the boundary between Sudbury and Great Cornard ran up the footpath between the Lucas/CAV factory, now Lucas Road, in Sudbury and the Armes factory, now Sainsburys, then in Great Cornard. The boundary came out at the Newton Road (A134) at Newton Croft, all of which was in Great Cornard. Indeed, much of what is shown on the LGBCE's map of 'Parish Warding Arrangements for Great Cornard' as 'Elm and Hillside ward', Sudbury, in 1974 was in Great Cornard.

However, the boundary did not run straight along the Newton Road to Maldon Court and Shawlands Avenue (then Northern Road) but wiggled through the Cats Lane estate, taking some of Elm Road and Hillside Road into Sudbury. In 1991, Babergh attempted to 'straighten up' the boundary much as the LGBCE is now proposing and there was outrage in Great Cornard. The senior district and parish ward member for Great Cornard, Mrs Betty Cocker, had been born, brought up, married, brought up her own family and worked all her life in Great Cornard. Suddenly, by administrative fiat she had been moved to Sudbury! Eventually, a compromise was reached under which the boundary between Great Cornard and Sudbury ran down the middle of Cats Lane, as it does now. This boundary was clear and obvious, and Betty Cocker continued to live in the parish of her birth. However, the Cats Lane estate remained in Sudbury. Indeed, the LGBCE's map of 'Parish Warding Arrangements for Great Cornard' shows that the present boundary is much clearer than the proposed new one, which runs around the back of the houses in Maldon Court.

GCPC has a policy of naming roads after well-known Great Cornard persons and families. The most noticeable road apart from Cats Lane itself in this area that LGBCE proposes to move is Betty Cocker Grove. Betty and her husband, Stuart, are now dead. The land on which their bungalow sat has now been redeveloped and the development is named Stuarts Drive. Yet another road, this time off Newton Road, Percy Ruse Close is named after Mr Percy Ruse, who was for many years the village footpath warden. It would be rather foolish of the LGBCE to move so many roads symbolising the contribution made to community life in Great Cornard into Sudbury.

- **Communications**

There are only two major roads into Sudbury from Great Cornard, the A134 Newton Road and the B1508 Cornard/Bures Road. However, a feature of roads is that they go in two opposite directions, and it is as easy to get further into Great Cornard along either of these roads as it is to get into Sudbury! Indeed, Sudbury town centre may appear nearer, but it is much more heavily congested with traffic.

The two major footways into Sudbury run alongside these two roads. In addition, however, there is a footpath which runs up alongside The Maldon Grey public house directly into Poplar Road near Maldon Court and hence within easy access of the Poplar Road shops. At the Newton Road roundabout, it is not necessary to go all the way to the roundabout before being able to walk up the steps which again lead into Maldon Court. There are no comparable alternative foot routes into Sudbury.

Many people from Maldon Court and other roads on the North Shawlands estate, as well as from Cats Lane itself, can be seen walking to Sainsburys to do their weekly shop. They do not necessarily continue into Sudbury town centre.

- **Numbers of Electors**

Our calculation is that the number of electors in the roads affected total 313 electors. A 4% increase would be 326 by 2023. On these figures, both Great Cornard and Sudbury would remain well within the 10% variance specified by the LGBCE, which is not the case with the proposed new ward for Polstead.

Returning to paragraphs 51-53 of the draft recommendations, we can see that there are no good reasons for damaging the integrity of the community of Great Cornard. The 'electors around Cats Lane' should not be excluded from the Great Cornard district warding, and the

North ward of Great Cornard Parish Council should not be subdivided into a Cats Lane ward and a North ward but should remain one North ward as it is at present.

Three District Councillors for Great Cornard

In the light of the draft recommendations and having given further consideration to whether or not to argue for three single-member wards in line with our fall-back option or to accept the proposal for one 3-member ward as in the draft recommendations, GCPC has decided **not** to argue for three single-member wards. Our reasons are as follows:

- We have now seen, both from your Cats Lane proposals and the warding proposals for Sudbury Town Council (STC), the damage you are capable of wreaking in our parish council warding arrangements. We believe the proposals both to exclude Great Cornard electors from the district council representation of Great Cornard and from the GCPC North ward, and the proposed warding arrangements for Sudbury which would result in four STC single-member wards, one 2-member ward, one 3-member ward and one 6-member ward, would tend to make local government in Great Cornard and Sudbury fragmentary, divisive, confusing and lacking in accountability.
- The poor technical quality of the LGBCE mapping and spreadsheet tools has made it impossible for GCPC to show how three coherent single-member district wards for Great Cornard could be created and impossible to justify the expenditure on staff time which would be needed to try doing so.

Draft Recommendations for Sudbury

At paragraph 56, the draft recommendations 'particularly welcome comments on our draft recommendations for Sudbury'. GCPC would not normally comment on issues affecting Sudbury alone, but GCPC and STC share a common interest in seeking to ensure that the warding arrangements for the two local councils are sensible and transparent and are not left in a mess by your inadequate attempts to ward the parishes of Sudbury and Great Cornard for the purposes of district representation.

We respectfully suggest that you might be able to achieve fewer, more coherent STC wards if, instead of three single-member wards and a 2-member ward for Sudbury, you seek to create either two 2-member wards and a single-member ward or a 2-member and a 3-member ward. Our objective would be to retain probably three STC wards with reasonably equal numbers of town councillors, making sense to Sudbury voters.