Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England consultation on new warding arrangements for Warwick District

I am making this submission on behalf of Cubbington Parish Council (“the Parish Council”) as Parish Clerk to the Council in my capacity as Proper Officer. Whilst the way that our meeting dates have fallen has not made it possible to adopt this submission in its final form by resolution of the Council sitting in full session, the general form that this submission should take was discussed at our January 2018 council meeting and the final text has been circulated to all councillors for approval, with no dissenting views received.

Mrs Jackie Chapman
Clerk to Cubbington Parish Council

Statement of Support for Warwick District Council (“WDC”)

The Parish Council recognises the need for an electoral review of the warding arrangements for Warwick District to deliver, as far as possible, electoral equality in 2023, based on the estimates that have been made of growth in elector numbers and changes in distribution.

The Parish Council also supports WDC’s commitment to coterminous boundaries, as stated in its October 2017 submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (“the LGBCE”), and the implication that any future district council boundaries should not cross Warwickshire County Council division boundaries.

Notwithstanding, the Parish Council wishes to propose some refinements to the proposal that WDC has made to the current consultation, but in doing so has introduced no new infringements of the principle of district and county boundaries being coterminous.

Preamble

Cubbington Parish (“the Parish”) is formed by two electoral wards: Cubbington; and, New Cubbington. The boundary between the Cubbington and New Cubbington wards runs down the centre of Kenilworth Road and Rugby Road, Cubbington. Over this section, this line also forms the boundary between the Manor and Stoneleigh & Cubbington district wards and the North Leamington and Cubbington & Leek Wootton county divisions.

Whilst we support this arrangement as being in conformity with the principle of coterminous boundaries, it does have its drawbacks. It means that responsibility for the Parish falls currently to four district councillors (two from each of the two wards) and two county councillors (one from each division). So the two wards of the Parish, which clearly have close local ties and a strong community of interest, have different representation at both district and county level. In addition, we feel that, amongst district councillors in particular, the arrangement can sometimes lead to confusion about who is taking up a specific issue on behalf of the Parish and to a possible dilution of responsibilities.

It has been pointed out to us by our district councillors that the current representation allows them flexibility in attending meetings of the Parish Council, particularly in cases where other meetings clash. Whilst we accept that this is an advantage, we would not like to see the new warding arrangements risking exacerbation of potential problems of dilution
and defocussing by further increasing the number of district councillors representing the electors of the Parish, and would preferably seek a decrease. This is one of the reasons for us suggesting changes to the proposals that WDC is making to the LGBCE.

The Parish Council has confined this submission to a consideration of the future arrangements for the representation of the residents who currently live within the boundaries of the Stoneleigh & Cubbington and Manor district wards. The Parish Council is content to leave the future arrangements for other district wards to be discussed by others.

**The “do-nothing” scenario**

The Parish Council interprets the “do-nothing” scenario for the Stoneleigh & Cubbington and Manor district wards as retaining them both as two-member wards, with boundaries as they are now, whilst implementing the reduction in size of the District Council from 46 to 44 members, necessitating changes to be made to wards elsewhere.

According to the spreadsheet of electoral data for 2017 and 2023 that WDC has prepared (“the electoral data”), and which is hosted on the LGBCE consultation website, Manor ward had in 2017 a voter to councillor ratio of 2609, compared to the average across the District (“the whole-district average”) of 2373. This puts it at the top limit of 10% above the average (i.e. +10%).

The electoral data also allows the determination that expected population increases across the district by the time of the next but one district elections (2023), and the decrease in councillor numbers from 46 to 44, will have increased the whole-district average to 2803 voters per councillor. Over this same period the electoral data extrapolation predicts no increase in the size of the electorate of Manor ward. This means that although the ward ratio would remain unchanged at 2609, it will fall to -7% when compared with the whole-district average.

A similar analysis for the Stoneleigh & Cubbington ward shows the 2017 voter to councillor ratio as 2092, which is, at 12% below the average for the District (i.e. -12%), outside of the preferred tolerance. However, the growth in the electorate predicted for this ward is somewhat higher than for the District as a whole, so by 2023 the voter to councillor ratio, at 2582, comes within the acceptable tolerance, at 8% below the whole-district average (i.e. -8%).

These calculations demonstrate that, irrespective of the changes that might be required elsewhere in Warwick District to maintain electoral equality in 2023, equal voter representation, within the permitted tolerance, could be achieved in Manor and Stoneleigh & Cubbington wards without making any changes to the boundaries of these two wards.

However, there are some minor issues arising with the do-nothing scenario that merit some further discussion: these relate to places where the district and county boundaries would not be coterminous.

Stoneleigh & Cubbington district ward is smaller than the Cubbington & Leek Wootton county division, but lies wholly within it. This means that sections of the district ward boundary are not coterminous with county division boundaries. However, as none of these sections of district ward boundaries cross county boundaries, the arrangement does not infringe the principle of coterminous boundaries.

Manor district ward, on the other hand, is a substantially different area to the Leamington North county division, except that there is some overlap. Consequently, there is a significant infringement of the principle of coterminous boundaries with the current arrangement.
WDC’s proposal for the new Cubbington & Leek Wootton district ward

The submission that WDC made to the LGBCE in October 2017 considerably expanded the area encompassed by the district ward that contains the Cubbington ward of the Parish to fill the whole of the county division of Cubbington & Leek Wootton, at the same time increasing the representation from two-member to three-member.

The view of the Parish Council regarding that proposal was that it was probably too large a district ward to serve the interests of promoting effective and convenient local government, covering as it does fourteen parishes, organised into nine parish councils.

It would appear that WDC has come to a similar conclusion, because the proposal that WDC has made to the current consultation replaces the three-member ward proposal by a two-member ward and a single-member ward that, taken together, cover the same area as the originally-proposed three-member ward. The single-member ward is named in the WDC proposal as “Radford Semele”, whereas, somewhat confusingly, the original name of the three-member ward of Cubbington & Leek Wootton is still employed for the two-member ward: the Parish Council aims to remove this potential confusion by referring to the three-member ward in its submission as “Cubbington & Leek Wootton (old)” and to the two-member ward as “Cubbington & Leek Wootton (new)”.

The boundary that WDC has drawn to sub-divide Cubbington & Leek Wootton (old) is, over its length, coterminous with the currently-proposed boundary for the new Rugby & Southam parliamentary constituency. Whilst this division might prove convenient should this current recommendation of the Boundary Commission for England be confirmed and then accepted by Parliament in due course, it does not serve the goal of electoral equality particularly well.

Revised calculations of the voter to councillor ratio in 2023 for the Cubbington & Leek Wootton (new) ward and the Radford Semele ward have been furnished in the proposal that WDC has made to the current consultation: these reveal that the voter to councillor ratio for Cubbington & Leek Wootton (new) ward would be 3250, and would be 2686 for the Radford Semele ward. Compared with the ratio of 2803 voters to each councillor that is required for electoral equality across the district, this means that Radford Semele ward would be within tolerance at -4%, but that Cubbington & Leek Wootton (new) would exceed permitted tolerance at +16%.

The WDC proposal does, however, well reflect community interests to the extent that all parishes that are organised into the Eathorpe, Hunningham, Offchurch and Wappenbury Joint Parish Council have been kept together within the Radford Semele ward. Similarly, the other two parishes that share a joint parish council, Ashow and Stoneleigh, are together in the Cubbington & Leek Wootton (new) ward.

The Parish Council’s alternative suggestions for the Cubbington & Leek Wootton district ward

The Parish Council has investigated possible alternative warding arrangements for the fourteen parishes that are covered by the originally-proposed ward Cubbington & Leek Wootton (old), with the primary aim of reducing the area that any one councillor represents whilst achieving electoral equality within the permitted tolerance. This has proved an exacting task because, whilst the voter to councillor ratio for a three-member Cubbington & Leek Wootton (old) ward in 2023, at 3062, would lie within the permitted tolerance, at just over +9% relative to the whole-district average of 2803, this means that any division of electors into smaller wards must be quite closely equal in order to avoid one, or more, of those smaller wards drifting out of the permitted electoral equality tolerance.
The simplest alternative to the WDC proposal to improve district-wide electoral equality for the fourteen parishes that we have found is to make a small modification to that proposal, adding the Parish of Weston under Wetherley to the scope of the Radford Semele ward. Whilst this would necessitate the loss of the coterminous boundary with the currently-proposed boundary for the new Rugby & Southam parliamentary constituency over a part of the length of ward boundary, it does offer reasonable electoral equality: the revised Radford Semele ward would have a voter to councillor ratio in 2023 of 3030 (+8%) and the combined ratio for the remaining eight parishes would be 3096 (+10.5%).

A map, showing the modified Radford Semele ward proposal in red hatching, is reproduced below.

Notwithstanding that this modified proposal is acceptable on the electoral equality criterion, the Parish Council feels that the remaining portion of the Cubbington & Leek Wootton (old) ward would still represent a large area for two councillors to cover, whilst still gaining truly local knowledge and delivering a locally-targeted service. Accordingly, the Parish Council has explored potential divisions of the fourteen parishes into three single-member wards.

The simplest approach to this would be to divide the eight parishes that remain outside of the modified Radford Semele ward into two single-member wards. Unfortunately, the elector number totals for each of the parishes do not appear to permit such a division without creating island wards.

Accordingly, we have considered possible arrangements of all fourteen parishes, with a division of them into three single-member wards.

The most equal division of electors into three wards that we have been able to devise involves an island ward, but for completeness we have included it here, illustrated on the map that is reproduced overleaf.
The groupings, with the 2023 electorate projection in parenthesis, are:

(hatched green) Leek Wootton & Guys Cliffe (982), Ashow (113), Stoneleigh (1247) and Bagington (771) – voter to councillor ratio 3113 (+11%)

(hatched red) Bubbenhall (549), Cubbington (2139) and Weston under Wetherley (344) – voter to councillor ratio 3032 (+8%)

(hatched blue) Radford Semele (2135), Offchurch (209), Hunningham (169), Eathorpe (120), Wappenbury (53), Old Milverton (207) and Blackdown (130) – voter to councillor ratio 3023 (+8%)

The island ward that has been created, containing Old Milverton and Blackdown parishes, has been cross-hatched for clarity. The most-obvious way to remove this island ward would be to migrate Old Milverton to the green ward and Blackdown to the red ward. This would produce the following revision to the above elector figures:

(hatched green) Leek Wootton & Guys Cliffe (982), Old Milverton (207), Ashow (113), Stoneleigh (1247) and Bagington (771) – voter to councillor ratio 3320 (+18%)

(hatched red) Bubbenhall (549), Blackdown (130), Cubbington (2139) and Weston under Wetherley (344) – voter to councillor ratio 3162 (+13%)

(hatched blue) Radford Semele (2135), Offchurch (209), Hunningham (169), Eathorpe (120), and Wappenbury (53) – voter to councillor ratio 2686 (-4%)

Like the WDC proposal, this arrangement manages to keep the parishes within each of the two joint parish councils together.

The best three-ward solution the Parish Council has devised that avoids island wards is illustrated in the map that is reproduced overleaf:
The groupings in this solution are:

(hatched green) Leek Wootton & Guys Cliffe (982), Ashow (113), Stoneleigh (1247) and Bagington (771) – voter to councillor ratio 3113 (+11%)

(hatched red) Old Milverton (207), Blackdown (130), Cubbington (2139) and Weston under Wetherley (344) – voter to councillor ratio 2820 (+1%)

(hatched blue) Radford Semele (2135), Offchurch (209), Hunningham (169), Eathorpe (120), Wappenbury (53), and Bubbenhall (549) – voter to councillor ratio 3235 (+15.4%)

Again, the grouping of the two joint parish councils has been maintained.

Whilst this arrangement leaves the blue-hatched grouping with a higher voter to councillor ratio than is desirable, it achieves a small improvement over the voter to councillor ratio of the WDC-proposed Cubbington & Leek Wootton (new).

**WDC’s proposal for the new Leamington North/Leamington Manor district ward**

The submission that WDC made to the LGBCE in October 2017 for the district ward that contains the New Cubbington ward of the Parish was for a three-member ward that has exactly the same geographical footprint as the Leamington North county division and which, at that time, was referred to as “Leamington North” ward. Hence all of the boundaries of the proposed district ward were coterminous with the county division boundaries. This proposal was estimated to achieve a voter to councillor ratio in 2023 of 2884, which is +3% compared to the ratio of 2803 voters to each councillor that is required for electoral equality across the district and is, therefore, well within the required tolerance.

In the proposal that WDC has made to the current consultation a different arrangement has been proposed for the district ward that contains the New Cubbington ward of the Parish, this being a two-member ward which is referred to as “Leamington Manor”. This is not coterminous with the county division boundaries, as it contains portions of both the Leamington North and the Leamington Milverton county divisions. The new Leamington
Manor district ward is estimated to achieve a voter to councillor ratio in 2023 of 2574, which is -8% compared to the ratio of 2803 voters to each councillor that is required for electoral equality across the district, also achieving the required tolerance.

Accordingly, both of these proposals yield an arrangement that satisfies the electoral equality criterion, but the original Leamington North proposal has the added advantage of being coterminous with the county division, making it consistent with WDC’s commitment to coterminous boundaries as stated in its October 2017 submission to the LGBCE. In the light of this advantage that the original proposal has over the one now preferred by WDC, the Parish Council respectfully suggests that the LGBCE carries both proposals forward into its evaluation process. The Parish Council, for its part, has analysed both proposals for the opportunities that they offer for further sub-division of the ward, and report our findings in the next section of this submission.

**The Parish Council’s alternative suggestions for the Leamington North/Leamington Manor district ward**

A suggested sub-division of the projected Leamington North district ward into three single-member wards is illustrated in the map that is reproduced below:

The groupings in this solution are:

- (hatched red) polling districts KWMN2 (1203) and WMN3 (1658) – voter to councillor ratio 2861 (+2%)
- (hatched green) polling districts WCR3 (1215) and WCR4 (1426) – voter to councillor ratio 2641 (-6%)
(hatched blue) polling districts WCR1 (1033), WCR2 (1193), WMN4a (796) and WMN5a (129) – voter to councillor ratio 3151 (+12.4%)

If the voter to councillor ratio of the third of these groupings is considered too far out of tolerance, then a second option based upon two sub-divisions, one with single-member representation and the other represented by two members, may be configured by combining the green and blue sub-divisions. This two-member sub-division would achieve a voter to councillor ratio of 2896 (+3%).

A suggested sub-division of the projected Leamington Manor district ward into two single-member wards is illustrated in the map that is reproduced below:

The groupings in this solution are:

(hatched red) polling districts KWMN2 (1203) and WMN3 (1658) – voter to councillor ratio 2861 (+2%)

(hatched blue) polling districts KWMN5a (159), WNE2 (96), WMN4 (261), WMN4a (796), WMN5 (1040) and WMN5a (129) – voter to councillor ratio 2481 (-11.5%)

Summary of suggested alternatives

In the light of its above analysis, the Parish Council requests the LGBCE to consider the following alternatives to the proposals that have been made by WDC.

Regarding the warding arrangements for the fourteen parishes that surround Leamington Spa to the north and east, from Leek Wootton in the west to Eathorpe in the east and Radford Semele in the south to Batington in the north, we have advanced two alternative proposals for consideration.

The first follows the WDC submission in proposing a single-member ward and a two-member ward. The single-member ward is similar to the WDC Radford Semele ward, except that we are suggesting that the voters of Weston under Wetherley are located within the single-member ward rather than the two-member ward as WDC proposes. This adjustment allows better electoral equality across the five councillors who will represent the two wards, but requires that the boundary between the two wards departs from being coterminous with the currently-proposed boundary for the new Rugby & Southam parliamentary constituency over a portion of its length.

The constituent parishes in the Parish Council’s alternative are:
Single-member ward - Radford Semele, Offchurch, Hunningham, Eathorpe, Wappenbury, Weston under Wetherley

Two-member ward - Leek Wootton & Guys Cliffe, Old Milverton, Blackdown, Ashow, Cubbington, Stoneleigh, Bagington and Bubbenhall

This brings the voter to councillor ratio for the two-member ward from the WDC proposal that sits at +16% above that required for electoral equality across the district to being a more-acceptable +10.5%, which is almost within the permitted tolerance. At the same time the ratio for the single-member ward would remain within the permitted tolerance, moving from -4% to +8%.

The second alternative that the Parish Council wish to suggest to the LGBCE is arranged as three single-member wards:

- Leek Wootton & Guys Cliffe, Ashow, Stoneleigh and Bagington
- Old Milverton, Blackdown, Cubbington and Weston under Wetherley
- Radford Semele, Offchurch, Hunningham, Eathorpe, Wappenbury, and Bubbenhall

This arrangement has the advantage of splitting a fairly large rural area between three councillors, providing each with a manageable territory to get to know well. The Parish Council is making this suggestion because we feel that this division of councillor responsibilities will best serve the cause of promoting effective and convenient local government. The Parish Council accepts, however, that there is an issue of electoral equality with this proposal in that, whilst the second ward lies within the permitted tolerance (+1%) and the first is only just outside (+11%), the third ward grouping is rather higher than would be wished at +15.4% above that required for electoral equality across the district. Even so, this still represents a slight improvement on the two-member ward that WDC has proposed.

The Parish Council hopes that the LGBCE will agree that the potential administrative benefits of the three single-member arrangement is cause to make an exception on electoral equality.

Whilst the Parish Council would view the single-member and two-member divisions as acceptable, it would prefer the arrangement of three single-member divisions.

Regarding the warding arrangements for the more urban area that includes the New Cubbington parish ward, we have three alternative proposals for consideration, based upon sub-dividing wards that have been proposed by WDC.

The first two proposals are sub-divisions of the Leamington North ward, coterminous with the Leamington North county division, as was proposed by WDC in its October 2017 submission to the LGBCE. The Parish Council favours this arrangement in the light of its coterminous boundaries and prefers a further sub-division into three single-member wards, despite the (slight) electoral equality imbalance that this involves. The Parish Council views an alternative arrangement, with one single-member and one two-member sub-divisions, as less preferable but acceptable.

The three single-member sub-divisions proposal contains the following polling districts:

- Single-member sub-division 1 – KWMN2 and WMN3
- Single-member sub-division 2 – WCR3 and WCR4
- Single-member sub-division 3 – WCR1, WCR2, WMN4a and WMN5a
Whilst sub-division 1 and sub-division 2 meet the electoral equality criterion, sub-division 3 would be 12.4% above the voter to councillor ratio required for electoral equality across the district.

The one-single member and one two-member alternative, which allows the electoral equality criterion to be satisfied, contains the following polling districts:

- Single-member sub-division – KWMM2 and WMN3
- Two-member sub-division – WCR3, WCR4, WCR1, WCR2, WMN4a and WMN5a

The third alternative, least favoured by the Parish Council because it departs from the principle of coterminous boundaries, is to further sub-divide the Leamington Manor district ward proposed by WDC in its submission to this current consultation into two single-member sub-divisions, as follows:

- Single-member sub-division 1 – KWMM2 and WMN3
- Single-member sub-division 2 – KWMM5a, WNE2, WMN4, WMN4a, WMN5 and WMN5a

Whilst sub-division 1 meets the electoral equality criterion, sub-division 2 would be 11.5% below the voter to councillor ratio required for electoral equality across the district.

We hope that the LGBCE will find our suggestions to be a helpful contribution to the debate.