To The Secretary
The Electoral Commission

Future Electoral Arrangements for North Hertfordshire

The Hitchin and Harpenden Conservative Association would like to support the submissions made to you by the Conservative Group on North Herts District Council in regards to your final recommendations in relation to Future Electoral Arrangements for North Hertfordshire.

We would also like to reinforce most strongly a very specific objection to the Boundary Commission’s recommendation for the amalgamation into a three-member ward of the presently separate one-member wards of Offa, Hoo and Hitchwood.

In para 136 it is stated that not one of the submissions received during Stage Three supported the recommendation to combine the three existing wards, yet, in spite of that, the Commission refuses to change in recommendation, justifying this position in para 142 as being on the basis of “whatever number of councilors allows us to best meet the statutory criteria”.

In para 5 it is stated that the relevant statutory criteria are

*the need to
- reflect the identities and interests of local communities
- secure effective and convenient local government and
- achieve equality of representation

It seems to be quite clear that what has dominated the Commission’s thinking in relation to this specific recommendation is solely the third of these criteria i.e. “achieve equality of representation”

We believe that even on this basis this recommendation is strongly flawed since if left as separate wards the variation from average would be within the proposed variations acceptable to the Commission in relation to their own recommendations in relation to other wards in NHDC.

Offa -18% BUT Weston is recommended at -19%.
If -19% is acceptable for Weston, then why not -18 % for Offa?

Hoo -9% as above

Hitchwood +3% BUT Chesfield is +13%.
If +13% is acceptable for Chesfield, then why not +3 % for Hitchwood?

We believe that the Commission’s thinking is flawed in relation to “reflecting the identities and interests of local communities”

In rural areas in particular, electors identify themselves with the smallest possible areas. The people of Pirton and the people of Breachwood Green, for example rarely meet each other.
but all have a strong identification with their local parish. The villages understand that there has to be some combination of parishes to make viable wards but strongly feel that this ought to be in the geographically smallest possible area. Since, as demonstrated above, there is not in fact an overwhelming numerical reason for disturbing the status quo, the parishes in these three wards do not wish the recognition of their individuality to be further diluted.

We believe also that the Commission's thinking is also flawed in relation to "securing effective and convenient local government"

Clearly, the unique link between Councillor and electors is the most obvious benefit of single member wards. In multi-member wards there is lack of clarity about which individual Councillor he or she should regard as representing their personal interests. We suggest that this is a weakness everywhere it is implemented but specifically in rural areas.

If implemented, this proposal would mean that all 5500 electors have to be canvassed and have literature distribution etc for four years (including County Council elections) instead of to only 1700 to 2100 electors in two out of every four years. This places great strain on the campaigning capabilities of all parties, since all parties find it difficult to get enough volunteers to comprehensively campaign to the extent they would like. Electors complain that they are not fully informed on all the local issues. The result of combination would be less democratic not more.

Although all these three wards are traditionally comfortably Conservative and combination will not, in the short term, in itself affect the political make-up of the District Council, in fact combination makes it harder for one of the opposition parties to win one or more of these seats, if they have to win a majority in the combined area, whereas they have won Hoo in recent years. In spite of the fact that this gives a slight advantage to the Conservatives if the wards were combined, we still nevertheless believe keeping the uncombined wards would be more democratic.

*For all of the above reasons, we urge you to reconsider your specific proposal in relation to combining the three existing wards*

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

A P Strong
Association Chairman