

## Porter, Johanna

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**From:** Fuller, Heather  
**Sent:** 04 February 2015 15:30  
**To:** Porter, Johanna  
**Subject:** FW: Jo, following our conversation of this morning.  
**Attachments:** My lane, Welbourn.png; Blankney Fen.jpg; View of Welbourn from my window.png

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**From:** MARIANNE [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 04 February 2015 15:25  
**To:** Reviews@  
**Subject:** Jo, following our conversation of this morning.

To the Boundary Commission  
[reviews@lgbce.org.uk](mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk)  
30<sup>th</sup> January 2015

Dear Sir,

### Boundary Commission

#### Introduction

Our group agrees with much of the content of submission from the County Council setting out the issues to balance. This proposal differs in its tipping point of that balance. I support 75 members, the consensus position agreed by all political group leaders in November, not the 71 members later submitted by the Council following the December full Council meeting (debate available on line). It is fair to say the Council decision was not unanimous.

#### Number of Councillors

I support 75 councillors for Lincolnshire County Council. This provides some reduction in numbers to satisfy a desire to demonstrate savings, balanced with increasing size of our task with an increasing population and our County's exceptionally sparsely populated geography. I believe that further reductions will erode our ability to serve our electorate, to a significant effect in some wards.

#### Making Savings

It is the Executive who receive extra allowances for responsibility for the organization, so it is those allowances that would logically decrease with the size of the organization. Front-line councillors, whose primary responsibility is for front-line democratic accountability could logically increase in proportion to the increasing population. Councillors work hard (average 36hrs/week) for comparatively little remuneration, and provide good value for money to residents. We already have difficulty finding good candidates who want to take on the job of councillor, not helped by knowing the task is likely to rise to 39 hours per week on average.

However, it is fair to say that some of my members saw savings as being more important.

#### Serving our rural county

We have a very large, rural, sparsely populated county which makes it hard for councillors to keep close connection with their electorate. Our population is not only small for the area covered, we also have communities very widely spread throughout the area. Some sparsely populated counties have moorlands without any residents, so the remaining population is more accessible, bunched to the edges. This is not the case in Lincolnshire. Traditional rural farming has meant each smallholding piece of land was supplied with a cottage and outbuildings. (Photos attached, Blankney Fen and Welbourn). More remote barns in the fields have also been converted for residence and farm worker cottages, usually not adjacent. This has created a very widespread population often disconnected, very

difficult to meet and hard for the Council to service. Work on this by the Sparse group of the Local Government Association demonstrates that Lincolnshire is in the top three most sparse authorities of the country, second to Cornwall.

Being so sparsely populated also means they have a poorer internet service. Our reducing council budget has also meant reducing support for bus services and diminishing transport links. Thus individuals and groups often need to seek support from councillors in their own homes or immediate local neighbourhood, increasing the workload.

Many of our councillors already have vast areas to cover for parish meetings or visits to assess a problem. Making these areas even larger leads to alienating residents further and undermines democracy. For example, I represent the area only just south of Lincoln and have 11 villages with Parish Councils or Parish Meetings, most of which meet monthly and they expect me to attend almost every one, which I do. My neighbouring ward has 16. Other councillors in more rural areas have more. I agree with the para 25-31, except that that a conclusion of more councillors would be the logical conclusion, and I support 75.

On average, half of our time is spent on local work (par 32 -34 of Lincolnshire County Council's submission). I am not convinced by par 35, about commissioning meaning we will have less to do. In my experience, outsourcing does not abdicate responsibility and local councillors are required by the public to be as much involved as ever in ensuring a fair and proper service is actually delivered.

As residents become less partisan in their choice of councillor, relying more on their knowledge of the individual than the party, the opportunity for connection with their democratically elected councillor becomes ever more important. This is already reflected in that our Council is in no overall control, a pattern increasingly repeated across the country. If people are not prepared to accept party lines, then they must have every opportunity to meet their councillors and indeed, the candidates. You can see how hard this might be, looking at the pictures attached, taken near my area, Blankney Fen and Welbourn.

#### **Current estimates of electorate**

The fallability of the current population estimates has been covered by others and we also have evidence of errors, particularly around Boston. The suggestion that the number of voters will decrease as people are less likely to register on the new system is a temporary anomaly associated with change, is not evidenced and should not be included. Indeed, asking at North Kesteven District Council recently, they were encouraged with their success, despite the extra bureaucracy required for new registrants. However, the key point is that Councillors work for all their residents and do not stop at the door because the residents have not yet registered.

#### **Future Growth in Populations**

We are also a rapidly growing population, well above the 2.3% suggested. The recent change in the National Planning Policy Framework and the lack of any valid local plans, save South Kesteven, has created a green light for developers from far and wide. Even before the change, my own District, North Kesteven has seen one of the highest rate of house-building in the country. Since the change in planning law, coupled with our lack of a Local Plan to provide control, the applications are flooding in and being passed, either by the Council directly or by the Inspectorate, who are driven by the National Planning Policy Framework. This rapid increase in permissions is only just happening and it is unclear how fast they will be filled, though our past experience from the last Local Plan would suggest certainly within ten years.

The Central Lincolnshire Local Plan has estimates for population extension most recently suggested an additional 42,800 houses. The new plan has published a range up to over 45,000 new homes by 2036. Past experience showed that the plans encouraged growth and the targets were more than achieved well before the plan expired. The plans were then redrawn with a higher estimate.

#### **Single Member Divisions**

We all agree on single member divisions on natural boundaries being most desirable. I share a District ward and we duplicate almost every local meeting as we both have to attend. We are the same political group, which is an enormous help. We have tried sharing the workload, but the electorate object pointing out that we are separately elected and each receive allowances.

## Conclusion

I recognise the desire to create a smaller number of councillors, based on a smaller local government, although we have a bigger job than ever. However, reducing democratic accountability makes it more difficult for people to feel connected with their councillor. Being a large, sparsely populated area means we do need more councillors to cover the geography. We do not have the transport networks and reduced subsidies on buses means greater reductions in service in the future.

We do embrace IT, but this is no solution in the most rural areas. It is useful, but it is not enough. We still need to build trust with human contact and have detailed meetings on site, whether it is on highways, drainage, planning, businesses or schools, either in support of groups of residents or indeed, individuals.

We do have serious doubts about the current and projected numbers. The number of electors is fast-changing and plans are in progress due out in June for Central Lincolnshire, later for the other areas.

Kind Regards,

*Marianne*

### **Councillor Marianne Overton MBE**

Independent Councillor for Branston and Navenby on Lincolnshire County Council

and for the Cliff Villages on North Kesteven District Council

Leader of the Lincolnshire Independents

Vice Chairman of the Local Government Association

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