

Cambridge Green Party's comments to the Local Government Boundary Commission

Regarding Cambridgeshire County Council Divisions.

The Cambridge Green Party accepts the necessity to redraw the boundaries of the Cambridgeshire County Council in order to reduce the variance in the number of electors each councillor represents. However, we oppose many aspects of the current proposal. Our opposition stems from two separate issues. Firstly, we question the underlying premise that fewer councillors would improve the efficiency of council business. Secondly, there are many important issues that must be addressed with regards to the proposed boundary changes.

In many instances we find that the latest proposal by the Cambridge Liberal Democrats to be a much better thought recommendation; in particular with respect to Romsey, Petersfield, Market, Castle and Newnham. Specific details are outlined below.

Fewer councillors

We believe that a higher proportion of electors to councillors would mean that councillors will not have enough time to represent all their electorate fairly. By reducing the number of councillors from 69 to 61, each councillor will in effect be approximately representing an extra 1000 people by 2020. This is a considerable amount of additional workload for councillors. As councillors are only part time officials with a small remuneration, it is unreasonable to expect them to manage the workload effectively. Therefore, we expect the reduction to adversely affect the political representation of the electorate and the democratic integrity of the County Council.

Proposed changes

There are several proposals that make little sense and show a distinct lack of understanding of the communities within the city.

Romsey

The proposal to split the north of Romsey and relocate it to Barnwell is bizarre. There is an existing natural geographic boundary along Coldhams Lane, including Stourbridge Grove, which physically splits Barnwell and Romsey. Moreover, there is a clear and strong sense of community in Romsey that would be weakened through this change. This was made clear during the recent by-election. Discussions with residents in this 'Barnwell area' revealed substantial opposition to the change. Many feel a strong connection to Romsey and believe that their geographical isolation from Barnwell would mean new councillors would neglect them.

This northern border should be reinstated. The Cambridge Green Party agrees with proposals by the Cambridge Liberal Democrats with regards to how the Romsey ward should be redrawn.

Castle and Newnham

As no other wards in Cambridge will have two councillors, it makes no sense to merge two existing, single councillor wards into a single, two councillor ward. The justification in the report is weak and has little detail explaining this strange decision.

Again, the Cambridge Green Party finds itself in agreement with the Cambridge Liberal Democrats with how Castle and Newnham should be divided.

Chesterton and King's Hedges

We are very concerned about the extent to which the proposal takes a lot of deprived parts of East Chesterton and combines them with Kings Hedges. The council should seriously consider the impact

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of further concentrating deprived families and individuals and asking a single councillor for Kings Hedges to represent them all. On many indicators, such as child poverty, Kings Hedges and East Chesterton come up as highly disadvantaged. Currently, there are areas of both which are better off, and currently identify as part of the same communities. The new proposals risk alienating and creating rifts between these areas.

We request that the County Council calculates how the new proposals would affect poverty indicators in these new wards. While the new divisions do not entirely divide the area into privileged and under-privileged areas, they seem likely to exacerbate this concentration of need. Many King's Hedges residents feel marginalised and perceive themselves to be 'last on the list' of council priorities. This is evidenced by the low electoral turnout and responses from the doorstep.

Currently many people in Chesterton strongly identify as a part of Chesterton; quite distinct from Arbury and King's Hedges. People in Chesterton are united across socio-economic barriers to a certain extent, and we would be concerned about upsetting that balance and replacing it with a 'sink' ward. The excellent work of Brownsfield community centre and the Chesterton Festival have furthered a strong community identity across the board.

The division also affects the distribution of schools. Kings Hedges will have five primary schools, three of which are known to have major challenges. It will also have the North Cambridge Academy. It seems unlikely that a single councillor could cover this adequately, on top of the large casework needed in more deprived areas. Meanwhile Chesterton division would no longer contain either Chesterton Community College or Chesterton Primary school. Although these schools are not under LA control, this does not seem to be following natural community focal points.

Market and Petersfield

The plan to merge, split and rename Market and Petersfield is perhaps the least comprehensible proposal. We find it is absurd to claim that Petersfield does not have a distinct sense of community. There is a clear community focal point around the Mill Road area. This is evidenced by the Mill Road Society, the Mill Road Winter Fair, the Gwydir Street Party and the reputation Petersfield / Mill Road has for the best pubs in Cambridge. These pubs are located on both sides of Mill Road. Literature about Cambridge for tourists refers to Mill Road as a special area because of its multicultural nature and independent businesses. The Market ward also has a distinct character because it represents the historic centre of Cambridge.

The current proposal completely ignores and destroys these two distinct wards. We strongly support the Cambridge Liberal Democrat proposal whose proposals seek to maintain the general shape of these two wards, expanding only to achieve the necessary variance.

Queen Edith and Cherry Hinton

There are two main concerns regarding border changes to Queen Edith's. The first is the loss of the Wort's Causeway area to Trumpington. This is the ward's primary border with its parliamentary constituency in South Cambridgeshire and residents are concerned that, by making it a far corner of a large ward, the risk to this already threatened area of Green Belt will deepen. Secondly, those who were previously in Cherry Hinton would, under the proposals, lose their right to vote for the City MP by being incorporated into Queen Edith's. Already an issue with Queen Edith's residents, widening this particular disenfranchisement is highly problematic.

Recognising these resident concerns, the Cambridge Green Party advocates the retention of Queen Edith's southern border at Wort's Causeway whilst accepting that the Addenbrooke's site be

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incorporated into Trumpington. The boundary line along Cherry Hinton Road is more subtle to define but allowing residents to retain their vote in Cherry Hinton should be a priority.

Concluding Remarks

We feel very strongly that the proposed changes in the wards mentioned above fail to reflect their respective community identities and concerns. In many instances we agree with the Cambridge Liberal Democrat proposals. It should be noted that in the City Council elections just gone, the Cambridge Liberal Democrats and the Cambridge Green Party achieved 28% and 16% of the vote respectively. That both groups agree that the current proposal fails to achieve its stated aims is significant. Gaining a cross party consensus is necessary for these changes to be democratic and fair. We hope that the commission will take this into account when considering the recommendations.

