

Dear Sir/ Madam

I would like to express my concern about the proposal to split the Meadows into two wards, the New Meadows and Embankment, and ask the Commission to consider the creation of a single, two-member ward, to cover the whole area. I believe this would be most easily achieved by adding the two proposed wards together, thus ensuring that electoral equality requirements are fulfilled.

I write not only as councillor for Bridge ward for the last seven years, but also as a local Meadows resident, as Chair of Governors of a Meadows school (Victoria Primary School, but not seeking to represent the school on this matter), and as someone who has worked with a wide variety of local community groups and Tenants and Residents Associations over many years.

The Boundary Commission's proposal to split the Meadows into The New Meadows and The Embankment wards has caused a great furore in the Meadows, a community which has always identified itself as a single entity. While different areas exist within the Meadows, like anywhere, public services, the voluntary sector and community organisations all see the Meadows as a single community. People living everywhere and anywhere in the Meadows use the Bridgeway Centre, Arkwright Meadows Community Gardens, the Scout and Beaver Group, Meadows library, Queens Walk Community Centre, Meadows Advice Group, and Victoria Embankment, among other things. All three primary schools also draw children from around the Meadows. Therefore splitting political representation into two would be nonsensical and the result would be less effective for residents.

The existence of different local residents' groups should not be cited as evidence for a split in the Meadows. While separate organisations do exist for different parts of the Meadows, their meetings attract residents from across the area. When issues are discussed at these meetings, from cleanliness to GP provision, to changes to our parks, interest and ownership comes from across the Meadows and is never limited to where within the community people live. Meadows in Bloom, which is an important community endeavour, is supported by activists from all parts of the community and the route has always taken in both the Old and New Meadows.

This was all amply demonstrated at the busy public meeting which was called to respond to these proposals. Almost all local residents identified with the Meadows as a single community, and opposed the proposals to divide the area. Many have lived in the area all their lives, moving between different homes but always identifying themselves as being from the Meadows. They expressed a great deal of shock and anger at the boundary commission's proposals, and concerns about social segregation and the removal of the Meadows name from the Embankment ward name were articulated.

As a resident of the Meadows, I have never distinguished between the Old and New Meadows as the split proposed would seek to do. Indeed, while I live in the Old Meadows my frequent use of the shopping centre and the tram route, both of which fall in the New Meadows, means that my interest is as often located here as other parts of the Old Meadows.

As a Councillor for the Meadows, I believe the community is a single entity and therefore should not be split. But I also feel that political representation, and local government, would be more efficient and effective were the residents, and the services they use, all located within the same ward rather than being divided.

In summary, I believe that the Meadows is a single community and should form a single ward, represented by two Councillors to fulfil electoral equality requirements. This arrangement would be supported by local people and provide the area with effective and efficient political representation and local government.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Heaton