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Local Government Boundary Commission for England,
14th Floor,
Millbank Tower,
Millbank,
London SW1P 4QP
www.consultation.lgbce.org.uk

Monday 26 March, 2018.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Boundary Review: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

I write to express my views about the proposed ward boundaries for Basingstoke and Deane Borough. I have lived in North East Hampshire all of my life and have served in local government on both Hart District and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Councils. I have been the Ward Councillor for Upton Grey and the Candovers since 2002. It is my view that the existing ward boundary works well, that the parishes within the ward should remain together and that there is a compelling case that the ward should remain a single member ward.

The ward is about 35 square miles of open countryside, an area greater than central London, with a population of 2,795 people¹. Within the ward are 14 parishes, 10 active churches, 2 shops and 2 village schools. There are less than a dozen street lights and the vast majority of houses do not have mains drainage. None have mains gas.

¹ 2011 census

The area south of the M3 has been a single member ward for as far back as anyone can remember. What makes the ward distinct is its isolation from the rest of Basingstoke and Deane which is caused by the barrier of the M3 motorway. There is only limited connection with the wards to the north in the Borough.

The parishes south of the M3 motorway work well together and form cohesive groups, sharing common interests and having strong connections with areas outside of the Borough. The parishes in the north east of the existing ward are part of the catchment area for a school that is outside the Borough, namely Robert Mays School in Odiham. The parishes in the south of the existing ward are part of the catchment area for a school that is outside of the Borough, namely Perins School in Alresford.

Historically, the ward formed part of the same policing beat area which also included Mapledurwell, Up Nately and Dummer (the 3 other parishes south of the motorway). The parishes of Mapledurwell and Up Nately are connected through the same vicar and church structure to the churches in Tunworth, Upton Grey, Weston Patrick and Herriard. The parish of Dummer is connected through the same vicar and church structure to the churches in the Candovers.

No other ward in Basingstoke and Deane can make the case for being exceptional. Parts of my ward (and I know this from the residents) see themselves as more closely connected to Odiham in Hart District, and Alresford in Winchester District than they do to Basingstoke and Deane Borough and would have no objection to being joined to those Local Government areas. This demonstrates their remoteness and isolation from the rest of Basingstoke and Deane.

The ward had 2,331 electors in 2015. Clearly with the reduced number of wards, that is proposed by the Boundary Commission, creating a three member ward from all the parishes in the existing ward would be impossible. It cannot combine with Old Basing Ward which already has 3 members and new housing to accommodate. It cannot combine with Oakley Ward which also has 3 members and will have to accommodate the significant growth from the Manydown development. The parishes in the existing ward are also separated from the large villages of Old Basing and Oakley by the M3 motorway.

The only potential option in order to create a 3 member ward would be to split the ward in two. However, wherever the split would be, it would result in communities being split apart, as neighbouring parishes work closely with each other based on many different levels of community interaction. For example, Herriard, Upton Grey, Tunworth and Weston Patrick are in the same church grouping and share many community events and landownership stretches across parish boundaries. Yet, Herriard is closely aligned to Ellisfield and Cliddesden as a result of a primary school and land ownership. Cliddesden is linked to Farleigh and Nutley through land ownership. Nutley is linked to Axford and Preston Candover through having a combined Parish Council. Bradley is linked to Preston Candover through land ownership. Brown Candover and Chilton Candover focus on Preston Candover for its primary school and shop. The churches in Cliddesden, Ellisfield, Farleigh, Brown Candover, Preston Candover and Bradley are all linked together in the same church grouping (Benefice).

Furthermore, the rural nature of the ward, means that there are many homes that are isolated and near to parish boundaries, so that people often

have a greater affinity with their neighbouring parish. This applies where farms cross parish boundaries or where there has been development through the conversion of farm buildings into new homes. For example, parts of Winslade ward that are at Hackwood are much more closely linked to Tunworth (through their attendance at community events) than they are to Winslade.

Any splitting of the ward would result in part of the existing ward having to be joined to Old Basing Ward and part having to be joined to Oakley Ward. Each of those other areas are significantly different in character to the rural parishes to their south due to their more urban nature. It is not a natural fit and would result in significant difficulties for any councillor trying to balance the competing interests regarding encouraging new housing development to the north of the M3 motorway and restricting new housing development to the south of the M3 motorway (or vice-versa).

Any split in the existing ward would mean that the two new wards would have two different Members of Parliament. Currently, the entire ward is in the North East Hampshire Parliamentary Constituency. If the eastern part of this existing ward joined with Old Basing Ward, then the northern part of the new ward would be in the Basingstoke Parliamentary Constituency and the southern part in the North East Hampshire Parliamentary Constituency. If the western part of the existing ward joined with Oakley Ward, then the northern part of this new ward would be in the North West Hampshire Parliamentary Constituency and the southern part would be in the North East Hampshire Parliamentary Constituency. The existing ward boundary works perfectly well with a single Member of Parliament and a single Borough Councillor. Any split to the ward is a recipe for confusion by the electorate.

All of this makes the case for the existing ward of Upton Grey and the Candovers being regarded as exceptional. A single member ward of Upton Grey and the Candovers with an enlarged population could be created by adding the parishes of Mapledurwell and Up Nately to the ward area.

In all the circumstances, I ask that the ward of Upton Grey and the Candovers is retained as a single member ward.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Mark B. Ruffell