



MARK GARNIER MP

Member of Parliament for Wyre Forest

Review Officer (Wyre Forest)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

23rd June 2014

Dear Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Boundary Commissions proposals for Wyre Forest that were published in April. In gathering together this response, I have met with a number of local representatives and parishes and whilst their thoughts extend further than is covered in this letter, I have tried to limit my response to that which is achievable and raises the greatest amount of disquiet amongst the community I represent.

The commission's proposal for a universal pattern of three member wards differs substantially from my submission to the Boundary Commission in November 2013, most notably in its proposal for 11 three member wards as distinct from the alternative, existing proposals.

In its broadest sense, I am sympathetic to the Boundary Commission's aim for electoral equality. The argument of similar sized wards and every ward being asked to vote at every election does make sense. Indeed, whilst I have some reservations with regard exact locations of boundaries – detailed, I believe, in the Wyre Forest District Council submission - I have serious concerns about why the commission has placed the biggest value on electoral equality at such a sacrifice to community identity.

In particular I have concerns about the proposed Severn Valley ward. All of the other proposals, whilst not perfect, are broadly acceptable. The proposed Severn Valley ward would divide the existing community of Burlish Park and Lickhill and then remove that small community from Stourport, placing them with another distinct community which is part of another town. The commission places importance on parish boundaries, easily identifiable boundaries and local ties. The recommendation of the Severn Valley Ward contradicts this in every way because the proposed ward would not maintain local ties or place importance on parish boundaries. This particular ward differs from proposals for town council wards

which are naturally confined to the towns. No part of Bewdley is currently joined with another town. Indeed, the geography of the area makes a clear distinction between the two towns with a significant ridge separating the communities.

Electors in Stourport will feel strongly about being disconnected from Stourport and vice versa. Those electors in Stourport who are transferred to the new Severn Valley Ward are unlikely to do their shopping, go to the doctor or send their children to school in Wribbenhall. It is also difficult to see how an elected councillor could represent two communities as distinct as these. They have differing interests for the purpose of highways, bus transport and social services.

My recommendation would be to revert the small part of Lickhill included in Severn Valley back into the Stourport wards. The Mitton and Areley Kings/ Riverside Wards in Stourport in 2019 will have a variance below the norm of 6% and 3%. It would be possible to include electors in Lickhill who are proposed to be included in Severn Valley to be split so as to bring Mitton and Areley Kings/Riverside up to the norm or even somewhat above it. Clearly there would need to be some rethinking of the boundaries within Stourport to accommodate the extra population, but this single item is simply unacceptable for reasons of community identity, geography, ease of representation and interests of the two communities.

Additionally the commission has proposed that the new ward be called Severn Valley. This is historically meaningless and fails to take into account the fact that Wribbenhall is one of the oldest settlements in Wyre Forest. The name Wribbenhall should remain regardless of any additional electors that may be brought into its area.

Yours sincerely



Mark Garnier MP