

# **Keep South Oxhey Together**

**Three Rivers Labour Group**

**Stephen Cox, Marie-Louise Nolan, Ana Bakshi,**

**Paul Gordon, Stephen King, Len Tippen**

We are pleased to be able to make further representations to you in respect of the current Electoral Review of Three Rivers District Council.

The Labour Group notes the Commission's support for the boundaries the Council proposed in Croxley Green, Rickmansworth, Chorleywood and Sarratt, which form part of your draft recommendations. However, with regard to the Abbots Langley and more particularly the Watford Rural areas, we do not support your draft recommendations.

### **Abbots Langley**

The Commission's draft recommendations do not in our view propose compelling and clearly defined boundaries. The most glaring example is the splitting of Abbots Langley High Street between wards. The draft recommendations are unnecessarily messy.

### **Watford Rural**

The Commission will recall that the Labour Group was opposed to the creation of a 39 member Council as we believed that this arrangement would not provide for sufficient flexibility and retention of long-established community identity and representation. Further, the view of the Labour Group was that an exclusive three member ward configuration would cause considerable difficulties and confusion. Thus it has proved in the Watford Rural area.

The Labour Group has considered both long and hard all possible alternatives in respect of warding arrangements. We have studied all options in depth and listened to residents' views in all three communities which comprise the Parish, South Oxhey, Carpenders Park and Oxhey Hall.

We have done this over a period of months and sought the views of residents direct on their own doorsteps. We have held a number of our regular surgeries at which this topic was raised by a surprisingly large number of residents. The matter was also discussed at the Watford Rural Local Area Forum last month, when again, local residents were able to put forward their opinions.

In its original submission the Council recognised that there were no easy answers as to how to re-ward this area. It accepted that, in order to ensure that the South Oxhey - a most distinct community - and which contains the majority of the population remained together, Carpenders Park ward was to be split between two wards. However, the Commission sided with the Conservatives' proposal which has the most unfortunate and unwelcome consequences for South Oxhey, namely, splitting this close-knit community in all directions.

If the Council's original proposal did not find favour with the Commission that is not, with respect, an opportunity to support something infinitely worse. Throughout this whole process we have sought to act dispassionately and propose only those boundaries which best reflected community identity. We would submit that others have not always sought to do likewise. We were surprised upon reading submissions received to date that a number of residents were fully conversant with the existence of the DCG polling district!

At the initial meeting of the Commission with Group Leaders and Deputies we understood that the practice of dividing streets and placing them in different wards would not be entertained. Instead, back gardens would be used to provide ward sensible boundaries. Therefore, we were surprised to see both Prestwick Road and Gosforth Lane divided down the middle in your draft recommendations.

We were astonished to discover that having briefly visited South Oxhey you left with the impression that the estate is bordered by the Metropolitan railway line! This factual inaccuracy did not inspire confidence in the thoroughness or understanding you had gleaned from your visit. South Oxhey is bordered by the London Overground as shown in photograph 1.

South Oxhey is a large, homogenous former London County Council estate built after the Second World War to re-house people who had lost their homes during the Blitz. It has always been seen as being apart from the surrounding districts and that feeling is as strong today as when it was built in the late 1940s. Many of the original residents still live on the estate as do their children and grandchildren. It is a unique area in Three Rivers District. It has the highest single concentration of social housing by far in the area.

South Oxhey has a main shopping centre with

- two small supermarkets
- undertakers
- greengrocer
- two bakers
- two bookmakers
- chemist
- launderette
- butcher
- weekly market
- several cafes and take-aways
- Indian restaurant
- a pub
- a post office
- Labour Club

It has the one petrol station and bank in the area. There is also a library, health centre, police station, Thrive Homes offices, Parish Council offices and hall, the Clitheroe Club, Step Up, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Ascend (a local charity), the Scouts, The Centre, and Youth Club - **thus making it the hub and focus of the whole estate.**

We find it totally bizarre and risible that the houses pictured on the right of photograph 2 are among those the Commission wishes to place in the Carpenders Park ward, when they are just a few feet away from the beating heart of the South Oxhey community.

We are fortunate that in South Oxhey many religious faiths are catered for (Roman Catholic, Church of England, Baptist, Methodist and Jehovah Witnesses) so people on the estate visit whichever is their particular place of worship.

Perhaps South Oxhey's most recent notable claim to fame was being featured in the BBC TV programme *'The Choir'*, which clearly demonstrated the strong community identity and pride that exists across the entire South Oxhey estate. As ward councillors we were delighted for the area, already well known locally, to receive national recognition. Now everyone knows where South Oxhey is!

Housing in South Oxhey is instantly recognisable as typical LCC housing stock - entirely different from the bungalows of Carpenders Park (photograph 3) and the detached properties on the Oxhey Hall estate. Contrary to the South West Herts Conservative submission, new housing in South Oxhey has not been confined to the area east of Prestwick Road. Residents in this part of South Oxhey, as in all other parts of South Oxhey, exclusively identify with South Oxhey because they know they live in South Oxhey – not Carpenders Park.

There have been other in-fill developments in South Oxhey and these have been successfully assimilated and integrated into the community. Even the Conservatives' previous submission recognises that South Oxhey is one community. One of their own councillors, Cllr Sansom, in his submission correctly identified a configuration which ensured that South Oxhey could be kept within two wards retaining its separate representation. The fact, as stated previously, that South Oxhey has an entitlement to five district councillors in its own right should not be overlooked or dismissed as your draft recommendations regrettably have done.

As councillors representing all the wards in South Oxhey, we are only too well aware from our heavy caseload of the multiplicity of issues affecting our constituents. It is true to say that in our experience other Council colleagues do not face the particular challenges presented to us. In August 2011 South Oxhey had 32% of the District's total number of people on long-term incapacity benefits. Figures from June 2012 show that 41% of young people in South Oxhey are not in education, employment or training. South Oxhey remains an area with higher unemployment claimants than the county average (in Northwick ward it was actually double). South Oxhey has the lowest number of car owners in the whole of Hertfordshire and is geographically isolated from surrounding areas.

All the above reasons incontrovertibly demonstrate the unique nature, character and community spirit that makes South Oxhey so distinctive from its neighbours. Therefore, we are absolutely flabbergasted at the Commission's singular failure to recognise what must have been staring them in the face.

Further evidence of its individuality which sets it apart from the remainder of Watford Rural is that, in addition to being constrained by the West Coast Mainline Railway line separating it from Carpenders Park, to the north it is separated from Oxhey Hall by the South Oxhey Playing Fields and the golf course. Given this geographical feature was cited as sufficient justification to preclude the existing Hayling ward being placed in the same parliamentary constituency as Oxhey Hall in the most recent review, we are naturally curious as to how this clearly defined boundary is no longer judged to exist. Throughout our extensive consultations with residents we have found no support for the artificial merger you propose. On the contrary, much anger has been expressed.

There has also been a great deal of confusion engendered by the Commission's lamentable failure to understand and accept that **South Oxhey is one complete community**. Therefore dividing it up in a piecemeal fashion, combining parts with Oxhey

Hall and subsuming another part into Carpenders Park, whilst calling what is left South Oxhey will not achieve the Commission's stated aim of providing 'for effective and convenient local government'. People in South Oxhey understand the estate's external boundaries. Whilst internal boundaries can be redrawn which resonate with residents, carving up and dividing chunks of a well-established, self-contained community and leaving what amounts to a rump, is confusing and incoherent.

At the initial consultation stage it is clear from the submission of the Oxhey Hall Residents Association that it never envisaged their area would be combined with South Oxhey. This in itself is clear evidence as to the illegitimacy of the Commission's draft recommendations.

Self-evidently Oxhey Hall and South Oxhey are entirely different in nature and outlook. This difference is stark and unmistakable (photographs 4, 5 and 6). This is why successive boundary reviews have retained both Oxhey Hall and Carpenders Park in the same county council division (Oxhey Park). Both Oxhey Hall and Carpenders Park are in the same parliamentary constituency (Watford). On the other hand, South Oxhey has its own separate and dedicated county councillor and is represented in Parliament by the member for South West Hertfordshire. This distinction, along with the previously separate representation on the district council for South Oxhey is being blurred.

In paragraph 53 of your report the Commission overly concerns itself with the communication links between Oxhey Hall and Carpenders Park. This is not something that has hitherto been perceived as an issue and certainly has not been a barrier to both areas sitting cheek by jowl in the same county council division. This arrangement has been most satisfactory for decades. It works.

In respect of paragraph 49 mention is made of there only being one crossing over the railway line. In fact there is another vehicular crossing to the north of Carpenders Park (Appendix A) which provides easy and convenient access for Carpenders Park residents wishing to travel to Oxhey Hall and vice versa. There is no need to take the longer route taking in most of South Oxhey.

### **The solution**

At the heart of the problem are two predominant factors; namely, the geography of the Watford Rural Parish area and the limitations imposed by a slavish adherence to three member wards as a 'one size fits all' approach. Clearly the geography cannot be changed. However, it is surely possible to make this less of an impediment than it is perceived by the Commission. This could be achieved through the adoption of a less rigid, common sense approach. It could be argued that both the Council's original submission and the draft recommendations have suffered from a lack of flexibility, producing undesirable outcomes which have enraged all communities within the Parish.

To break the impasse a solution which meets all the statutory criteria needs to be identified and implemented. We believe having read your report and submissions from other interested parties online that such a solution exists and which we believe to have considerable merit. It would maintain South Oxhey as a separate community, retain Carpenders Park in one ward, returning three members as now and for the Oxhey Hall estate it would provide for continued dedicated representation. To that end we shall be supporting the proposal advanced by the Liberal Democrat Party for a one member Oxhey Hall ward, covering the whole of the Oxhey Hall estate including Hampermill Lane

and Brookdene Avenue, a three member ward encompassing all of Carpenders Park together with those areas of Oxhey Hall ward east of the Hartsbourne Brook (Silk Mill and Green Lane areas). That area of the present Oxhey Hall ward directly abuts the neighbouring borough of Watford. So too does the existing Carpenders Park ward. This would provide for South Oxhey to have a two member ward and a three member ward, whilst recognising the intrinsic identities of its neighbours.

This proposal satisfies all the Commission's main considerations - equalising the number of electors each councillor represents; reflecting community identity; and providing for effective and convenient local government. Three Rivers has a history of different sized wards to accommodate its unusual shape. These have all worked perfectly well in the past and there is no reason to suppose that this would not be so were the Commission minded to support this proposal as the best and only solution.

Should you require any further information or clarification, we should be only too pleased to be of assistance.

Three Rivers Labour Group

7<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Photograph 1 - South Oxhey is bordered by the London Overground, not the Metropolitan Line on the London Underground.



Photograph 2 - On the right homes in Prestwick Road to be placed in with Carpenders Park despite being just a few feet away from those in the heart of South Oxhey on the left!



Photograph 3 - a typical bungalow street scene in Carpenders Park



Photograph 4 - one of many detached properties in leafy Oxhey Hall Ward



Photograph 5 - a typical street scene in Hayling Ward in South Oxhey with its former LCC stock - a world apart from Oxhey Hall!



Photograph 6 - more former LCC stock - this time from Ashridge Ward in South Oxhey which is entirely different from the neat rows of bungalows of Carpenders Park!



## APPENDIX A

Map quite clearly showing the Oxhey Road bridge that provides a well-used, quick and convenient way to travel between Carpenders Park and Oxhey Hall (via Green Lane). The route does not require the driver to traverse South Oxhey and is a very popular.

Local Government Bound. x

https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/add/informed-representation/583?id=583&bbox=496401,188943,518226,206943&l=0,1,0,1,1,1&s=3&p=Three%

**Draw on map**

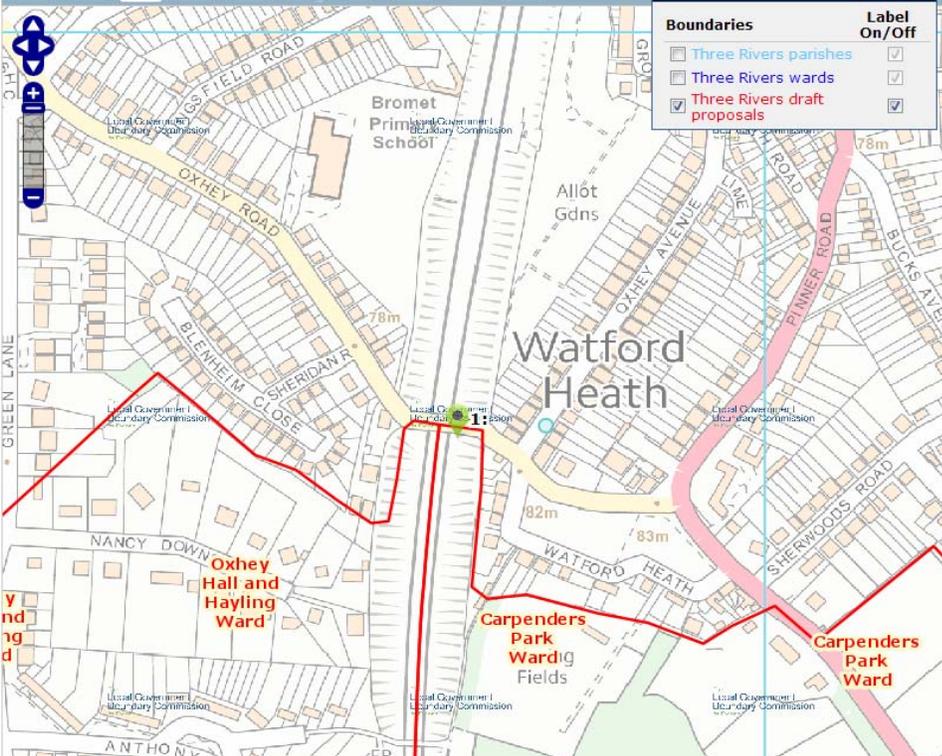
-  Marker Tool - click to drop a single point marker onto the map. To view a guidance video on adding a point click [here](#)
-  Line tool - click to start drawing a line on the map. Click to add each new point then double click to finish. To view a guidance video on adding a line click [here](#)
-  Polygon tool - click to start drawing a shape on the map. Click to add each new point then double click to finish. To view a guidance video on adding a shape click [here](#)

**Subject: Electoral review for Three Rivers District**



**Toggle layers: +**

| Boundaries   | Label On/Off                        |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three Rivers parishes                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Three Rivers wards                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Three Rivers draft proposals | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |



The map displays the Watford Heath area with several roads and landmarks. A red line highlights a proposed route starting from the south, crossing Oxhey Road via a bridge, and continuing north through Green Lane. Key locations include Bromet Primary School, Allot Gdns, Watford Heath, and Carpenders Park Fields. Roads shown include Green Lane, Oxhey Road, Watford Road, and Carpenders Park Road. A scale bar on the left indicates distances up to 100 meters.