

Fuller, Heather

From: Stephen Inman [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 June 2014 15:12
To: Reviews@
Cc: Owen, David
Subject: Wyre Forest Electoral Review - Submission by Bewdley Town Council

Dear Sirs

The Town Council once again welcomes the opportunity to comment on the next stage of this electoral review namely the draft recommendations put forward by the Commission.

The Town Council had previously argued that Rock should be a one member ward and that Bewdley & Arley should be a two member ward. It also felt Wribbenhall should be a two member ward.

Although the Council understands that the Commission's starting point for Wyre Forest is to have 11 wards each of 3 members to make up the totality of the District Council, it is clear that such premise then creates a straitjacket into which it is difficult to fit distinct communities. This may not be so significant in an urban area eg Kidderminster where wards and electors may intermingle more freely but in a rural area with villages and smaller towns, the inflexibility is bound to lead to ward boundaries that are incompatible with two of the Commission's three key criteria namely:

- Reflecting the interests and identities of local communities and
- Promoting effective and convenient local government

Given that is the position, the Council makes no further representations as to the separation of Rock from Bewdley & Arley.

The Council does though feel that the Parish of Upper Arley should remain intact and should not therefore be split or divided by the River Severn. The Parish should come within the Bewdley & Arley ward as at present.

The Council's key concern, however, is the treatment of electors in Wribbenhall (along with those of Kidderminster Foreign which is outside the boundary of the Town Council) being amalgamated with the north western outskirts of Stourport on Severn – Lickhill. It is quite apparent this has come about merely to "make up the numbers" ie to gain some rough electoral equality. The principle of that is acknowledged but the practical outcome here is unsatisfactory. Indeed arguably the electors of Stourport may feel more strongly about being disconnected from Stourport and put in with Wribbenhall than vice versa. In terms of communities, those electors which it is recommended are transferred to the new Severn Valley Ward are unlikely to shop in Wribbenhall, go to a doctors in Wribbenhall, send their children to school in Wribbenhall or be employed in Wribbenhall or even have their main social contacts eg pubs, local clubs, churches and societies in Wribbenhall. Instead they will look to the remainder of Stourport and its town centre or potentially to Kidderminster as the main town.

It is difficult to see either how an elected Councillor could satisfactorily represent two distinct communities one of which forms part of another recognised town. They have differing interests and whether it be for the purpose of highways, bus transport, social services or a host of other functions the link from the Lickhill area is with neighbouring Stourport (Mitton and Areley Kings/Riverside) not with Wribbenhall. That is mirrored in the current County Council boundary where the Division of Cookley, Wolverley and Wribbenhall does not contain any part of Stourport on Severn.

The Council notes that both the Mitton and Areley Kings/Riverside Wards in Stourport in 2019 will have a variance below the norm of 6% and 3% respectively. This is calculated to be some 636 electors. Severn Valley in 2019 will have a number of electors equivalent to the norm. The Council suggests it should be possible to tilt the balance so that those electors in Lickhill which are proposed to be included in Severn Valley could be split so as to bring Mitton

and Areley Kings/Riverside up to the norm or even somewhat above it. There would of course be a corresponding reduction in the Seven Valley number but if a 10% variation is allowable then Severn Valley could “lose” 741 electors. This would reduce considerably the numbers of electors in Stourport that would be affected by the change.

Perhaps it is worth stating that when the Town Council made a response to the earlier consultation in December it never for a moment felt that the Commission would contemplate interfering with the sanctity of Town Council boundaries and therefore that there would be any risk of Stourport being dismembered with part being transferred for District Council purposes into an area which came within that covered by a separate Town Council. The argument for villages and hamlets being moved is less controversial but being an urban area it seemed very odd that this could be justified. The reason it has come about is because of the straitjacket imposed in this exercise of having 11 x three member wards. When working through and mapping the District, there is bound to be a remnant that is difficult to mould into a coherent area. That seems to be the position and problem encountered by the Commission here.

No doubt recognising that situation, the Commission has come up with the innocent but historically meaningless name of Severn Valley to cover the broad area covered by Wribbenhall. This fails to take account that Wribbenhall is one of the oldest settlements within Wyre Forest and has a long and distinguished history including being recorded in the Domesday Book. Its name is to be removed from the District map by the Commission and instead be replaced by a common denominator. The Council felt this was wholly wrong and that the name Wribbenhall should be retained notwithstanding any additional electors that may be brought into its area. The Council was also disturbed to see that Bewdley, which prior to the 1974 reorganisation of local government had Borough status created by the Monarch Edward IV as long ago as 1472 is simply (on page 14 of the report) put under the heading of “The rural area”. It is a shame the Commission in its workings has so little knowledge or cognisance of these issues which matter enormously to local people and which help to distinguish them from equally proud and distinct communities in this instance such as Stourport.

The Council hopes that the Commission will look again at all of these issues and come back with some compromise that can be in keeping with all three of its stated criteria and not just one.

Yours faithfully

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