Local Government Boundary Commission for England proposals for West Berkshire Council

Proposed Burghfield & Mortimer Ward

Introduction

This response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England proposals for the restructuring of the wards for West Berkshire Council is from both West Berkshire Council Members for the Burghfield Ward (Carol Jackson Doerge and Ian Morrin), one of the two Members for the Mortimer Ward (Graham Bridgman) and the single Member for the Sulhamstead Ward (Keith Chopping). All of us are members of the Conservative Group.

These three wards are those that form an overlap with the Wokingham constituency (which remains unchanged in the final version of the Boundary Commission for England’s 2018 Review proposals): Burghfield (two members: Burghfield parish), Mortimer (two members: Beech Hill, Padworth, Stratfield Mortimer, Wokefield and Ufton Nervet parishes) and Sulhamstead (one member: Beenham, Englefield and Sulhamstead parishes).

The proposals for changes to ward boundaries

The final (revised) WBC submission to LGBCE was for a 42 member council including: a single member Mortimer Ward covering the Stratfield Mortimer parish alone, a two member Burghfield Ward comprised of the Beech Hill, Burghfield, Sulhamstead and Wokefield parishes, and a single member Aldermaston Ward comprised of the Aldermaston, Beenham, Brimpton, Padworth, Ufton Nervet and Wasing parishes. The new two member Burghfield ward would have had an electorate of +11% compared to the average number of electors per member predicted for 2022, the single member Mortimer Ward a figure of +7%, and the single member Aldermaston Ward a figure of +8%.

The LGBCE proposal is for a 43 member council, to include, locally, two three member wards:

- one to be called Burghfield & Mortimer and comprising the whole of the Beech Hill, Burghfield, Stratfield Mortimer and Wokefield parishes plus the southern part of the Sulhamstead parish, giving an average electorate figure per councillor of +10%;

- the other to be called Aldermaston & Bucklebury and comprising the whole of the Aldermaston, Beenham, Bradfield, Brimpton, Bucklebury, Englefield, Frilsham, Midgham, Padworth, Stanford Dingley, Ufton Nervet, Wasing and Woolhampton parishes plus the northern part of the Sulhamstead parish, giving an average electorate figure per councillor of -7%.

Consultation response

Our joint response is that:

- Splitting the Sulhamstead parish is an ill-founded move. Parishes are the basic building blocks of local democracy and splitting them between district council wards should not be undertaken unless it is wholly unavoidable, which is certainly not the case here.

- Whilst we follow the reasons given by the Commission (as to how the southern part of Sulhamstead relates in community terms to Burghfield) we don’t think that this outweighs the importance of keeping parishes wholly within wards wherever possible as referred to above, particularly when removing Sulhamstead from the new ward would reduce the currently predicted +10% electorate number (and if the proposed Aldermaston & Bucklebury ward took in the whole of Sulhamstead it would improve the current -7% electorate number).
• Whilst there is logic to creating a ward containing the service villages of Burghfield and Mortimer, given (i) the concentration of local population in those villages, (ii) that the Beech Hill and Wokefield parish councils have expressed a desire to remain connected to Mortimer (whereas the West Berkshire Council proposal put them into Burghfield), (iii) that the villages and surrounding area share a secondary school (The Willink), and (iv) that there is a developing synergy between local groups – particularly local volunteer groups – in the two villages, we fail to see that a similar logic extends to creating a vast new rural Aldermaston & Bucklebury ward. It is one thing to have a three member ward in a tighter, urban (or at least large village), setting, but quite another in the sparsely populated countryside.

Conclusion

To conclude, we four councillors support the response agreed at the meeting of West Berkshire Council last night (31 October 2017), including:

➢ A three member Burghfield & Mortimer Ward, but to exclude any part of the Sulhamstead parish.

➢ Three single member wards for Aldermaston, Bradfield and Bucklebury.

Graham Bridgman, West Berkshire Member for Mortimer
Keith Chopping, West Berkshire Member for Sulhamstead
Carol Jackson Doerge, West Berkshire Member for Burghfield
Ian Morrin, West Berkshire Member for Burghfield
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