

**Submission to the Boundary Commission
from Councillor Roger Harmer, Acocks Green Ward
26th September 2015**

Introduction

This submission is written to promote the interests of Acocks Green; the community I live in and represent. It is based on my experience as a Councillor having served Acocks Green in three terms since 1995. It is also based on discussions with a wide variety of community leaders and activists in the area.

This submission is not designed to optimize the chances of my political party winning as many seats as possible. Indeed I have discouraged my party (Lib Dems) from making a Birmingham wide submission, as I believe the primary role of Councillors in this process should be to promote the interests the communities we represent not those of our parties. We should then let you, the Boundary Commission, work out how to meet as many of those community interests as you can, within the constraints you are operating under. I am pleased therefore to note that the Lib Dems have not made a city wide submission.

The heart of my submission is that Acocks Green should be represented by a 2 Councillor ward, within the B27 post code area, which accurately aligns with the community of Acocks Green.

A 2 member ward works well for Acocks Green

The natural Acocks Green community is slightly larger than that required by a 2 Councillor ward – an electorate of around 16,268 on the projected electorate. This gives the Boundary Commission the ability to draw a ward entirely within the community, while having some flexibility to draw the precise boundaries according to the needs of neighbouring wards. For example taking the area of B27 within the existing Acocks Green ward creates a ward with an electorate of 15,320 on the current electorate and around 17,026 on the projected electorate. This is just 4.7% above the projected target, on the basis of providing 100 Councillors. Such a ward would include:

- All of existing polling districts CAB, CAD, CAF, CAG, CAH, CAI & CAJ (14,023 electors, projected to be 15,676)
- All of CAC less part of Fox Hollies Road and York Road (929 electors, currently, perhaps 950 on projections)
- Ninfield Road, Ninfield Gardens and part of Mayfield Road from CAA (212 electors, around 230 on projections)
- Marie Drive, Vicarage Grove and the section of Shirley Road in B27 from CAE (156 electors around 170 on projections)

Such a ward would not include the areas of B27 in the current South Yardley ward, in Woodcock Lane North and the roads around it, which residents also consider to be part of Acocks Green. Given that the community of Acocks

Green is a little too large for a 2 member ward this, from a community point of view, is the most obvious area to lose as there is a natural boundary consisting of the canal between it and the rest of Acocks Green and it has not been in the current Acocks Green ward. The result is that this area has the weakest links with the rest of Acocks Green.

A 2 member ward will support good community engagement in Acocks Green

The main case for a 2 member ward in Acocks Green is to support better community engagement compared with the alternative of multiple one member wards.

Acocks Green is a clearly defined and well understood area with a strong sense of community. It has a number of features and community organisations, which help to generate this:

- 1) A large suburban shopping centre in the middle of Acocks Green, which serves the whole of the community together with passing trade on the Warwick Road. Before 2004 the boundary between 2 BCC wards (Fox Hollies Ward and the old Acocks Green ward, which covered the northern half of Acocks Green and South Yardley) ran along the Warwick Road and this made it hard to co-ordinate improvements to the shopping centre. Since 2004, with the whole centre in one ward, a vision was developed, which has recently been partly implemented through major improvements to the Warwick Road between Station Road and Dolphin Lane.
- 2) A number of key facilities such as Acocks Green Library, Acocks Green Police Station, Acocks Green Railway Station and Acocks Green Bus Garage operating in or near the centre of Acocks Green and serving the whole of Acocks Green. These services include well-attended Councillor Advice Bureau, which operate from Acocks Green Library and nearby Archbishop IIsley School, which are both well known central locations for those needing Councillor support.
- 3) An annual Carnival which brings the community together and provides a valuable opportunity for community organisations to raise their profile and fundraise. This takes place close to the centre of Acocks Green and organisations right across Acocks Green participate. It has become financially more challenging to keep the carnival in recent years, without City Council grants, but the community has united, with the support of elected members, to ensure it happens.
- 4) Acocks Green Focus Group, which takes a strong interest in the built environment right across Acocks Green, monitoring planning applications, promoting the development of a Conservation Area and campaigning on issues such as improvements to the station.
- 5) 2 Active Neighbourhood Forums, which provide a mechanism for residents to engage regularly with the council and other public services. Each Forum has a strong tradition of supporting and working with projects right across Acocks Green – so the recent development of

the Friends of Fox Hollies Park in the south of Acocks Green has been supported not only by members of the Fox Hollies Green Neighbourhood Forum (covering Acocks Green south of the Warwick Road) but also members of the Acocks Green Neighbourhood Forum (covering Acocks Green to the north of the Warwick Road) using their experience of helping the development of the Millennium Green in their patch.

- 6) Acocks Green in Bloom, which has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of the environment across central Acocks Green (in both Neighbourhood Forum areas) in recent years and has just won a Gold Award from the Britain in Bloom judges – a testament to the work put in by residents across Acocks Green.
- 7) Acocks Green History Society covers the history of the whole of Acocks Green and delivers talks to organisations across the whole of Acocks Green. It has an excellent website (www.aghs.jimdo.com) and has recently received Heritage Lottery funding to produce a set of boards to promote a history walk detailing history from right across Acocks Green.
- 8) Fox Hollies Community Association. This is a major Community Organisation operating from Fox Hollies Forum at the end Greenwood Avenue in the southern half of Acocks Green. It provides a wide range of popular services including toddler groups, youth activities, older peoples support groups and runs a well visited environmental centre. It had a turnover of £142,755 in 2014/15. As an illustration of how the community across Acocks Green works together, it is based in the CAD polling district and led by three volunteer trustees (two living in the north of Acocks Green in CA1 and one in the very south of Acocks Green in the B27 part of CAE) and is supported by a voluntary management committee also with members from right across Acocks Green.

In addition there are a number of residents association and organizations operation on a more local basis but almost all engage actively with the wider Acocks Green organisations.

This network of organisations demonstrate that Acocks Green is a natural community with common interests which members of the community work together to promote and protect. I'm convinced this will be much easier to do on the future with one ward represented by 2 councillors, than by splitting it into two wards, or even worse, developing ward boundaries which cut across Acocks Green splitting it up into wards which include parts of other communities.

Conclusion

With a strong natural community covering an area just a little larger than that needed to sustain a 2 member ward, there is a strong argument that the Boundary Commission should make a 2 member Acocks Green ward part of its overall recommendations for Birmingham.