
This response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England proposals for the restructuring of the wards of West Berkshire Council, is from the West Berkshire Council members for Pangbourne, Purley on Thames and Tilehurst Westwood wards. These are respectively, Pamela Bale, Tim Metcalfe, Rick Jones and Laszlo Zverko. The response is also supported by the members for Tilehurst Birch Copse and Tilehurst Calcot wards. This represents five current wards with 10 members, to be reduced to four wards and eight members in most proposals.

The WBC submission to the Commission suggested that Tilehurst comprised three two-member wards, and that Pangbourne and Purley were combined, also in a two-member ward (including Sulham & Tidmarsh). The Commission’s own report stated that this arrangement had good electoral quality, but felt that the community boundaries were poor and somewhat arbitrary, even though they are the current Parish boundaries.

As a result of this view, the most recent Commission report proposes a radically different division for Purley, Pangbourne, and the central and north areas of Tilehurst. This separates Purley and Pangbourne based upon little community connection, enlarges the central Tilehurst ward area, and because that makes the rest of Tilehurst too small, combines that with Purley. This results in four wards of 1, 3, 2, 2 members.

A formal response from WBC most recently suggested that the proposed Tilehurst & Purley Ward be split, though we do not favour that, and commentary in the WBC response should indicate that the case is marginal at best.

Our Consultation Response

We believe that, whilst the Commission’s proposals do provide good electoral quality, and are therefore a workable and acceptable solution, our strong preference would be for the original WBC submission, for which we feel there are good reinforcing arguments for an even better administration of local government:

1. There is, in fact, a considerable community connection between Purley and Pangbourne:
   a. Pangbourne is the local service hub for Purley, providing not only shops and restaurants, but crucially, doctor’s surgery, library and neighbourhood police service; The only service provided from Tilehurst is secondary school.
   b. Community Safety – Purley and Pangbourne form the same NAG (Neighborhood Action Group), and suffer the same (often river-related) issues. Tilehurst is in a separate NAG.
   c. Socially, in the form clubs, societies, Scouts, etc., many activities are combined between the two villages.
d. Regular bus services between the two and to Reading. Bus service from Purley does not cover all of Tilehurst wards.

2. Our experience shows that two-member wards provide easier support to residents – there is cover for absence, and it is clearer which Councillor residents should approach for help.

We request that these arguments are given further consideration, but will obviously support the Commission’s final decision.