

Parish and town council submissions to the South Oxfordshire District Council electoral review.

This PDF document contains 13 submissions from parish and town councils.

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BaldonsPC-2012-05-01-r
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GoringPC-2012-05-02...



NunehamCourtenayP...



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WaterstockCP-2012-...



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WoodcotePC-2012-0...



WhitchurchonThames...

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

From: Dorothy Tonge [REDACTED]
Sent: 01 May 2012 17:04
To: Reviews@
Cc: Paul Isaacs
Subject: Electoral Review of South Oxfordshire

The Review Officer
LGBCE

1 05 12

Dear Sir

Baldons Parish Council

Representing the Parishes of Marsh Baldon and Toot Baldon

The Baldons Parish Council is generally supportive in principle of a reduction in District Councillor numbers providing it leads to more efficient decision making without loss of democratic representation.

Whilst greater efficiency may be demonstrated at SODC we do not have sufficient information or knowledge to comment on the proposed numbers. What matters is that parishes continue to feel that they have effective representation and a good working relationship with their District Councillor, as we have had . It would be unacceptable if, as a result of ward boundary changes to accommodate the reduction proposed, a loss of representation and democracy occurred and councillors were required to represent an increased number of parishes beyond that which might be considered reasonable. It is essential that District councillors can have the time to attend Parish Council meetings regularly and truly represent their constituents in whatever boundary changes emerge . Precise numbers should not be the driving force at this stage of assessment and it is essential that elected councillors whatever the number are trained and empowered to have the knowledge and wherewithal to ensure the democratic voice of their electorate is adequately reflected

In summary we can support the principle of change, but would not support a diminution of democratic representation that we should have from someone who knows and understands local issues, and who

[REDACTED]

can effectively represent views without conflict of interest or by being spread too thinly.

Looking ahead to any ward boundary changes we would welcome consideration of Marsh Baldon and Toot Baldon parishes being included in the same electoral ward as Nuneham Courtenay parish. As we argued for in the recent Boundary Commission review of Oxfordshire County Council, and which has been accepted, the communities have close ties with common facilities in school, church, youth club etc. The Baldons villages have few such links with the other parishes with which we are currently aligned

Yours Sincerely

Dorothy Tonge
Chairman

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: Sue Cooper [REDACTED]
Sent: 03 May 2012 13:35
To: Reviews@[REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: South Oxfordshire review

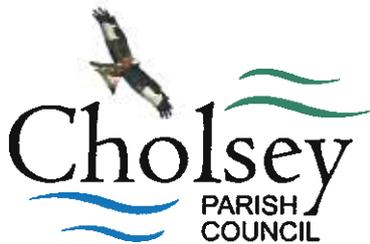
Benson Parish councillors considered your letter dated 27 March 2012 about the Electoral Review of South Oxfordshire at their recent meeting. They considered that this was an expensive, time consuming and non urgent exercise to carry out at a time when we are all supposed to be economising. It is regarded as a waste of time. As a rather more drastic solution it was suggested that SODC should be abolished and a unitary authority should be set up in this area.

*Mrs Sue Cooper (Parish Clerk)
Benson Parish Council*

[REDACTED]

e-mail benisonparish.council@virgin.net

[REDACTED]



Postal:
Visiting:
Telephone:
e-mail:

[REDACTED]
cholseypc@mediummail.co.uk

The Review Officer (South Oxfordshire)
Local Government Boundary Commission
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG.



26th April 2012

Dear Sir/ Madam

Electoral review of South Oxfordshire.

Thank you for the opportunity to take part in this review.

Cholsey Parish Council considers that 36 councillors could well be the right number of decision makers to reflect the views of the electorate at district council level of our area.

The Council assumes that we will drop down to one representative, from the current two, and we are content that the workload for one person will not be too onerous.

Our main concern is that Winterbrook should remain an electoral area of Cholsey and not be passed into Wallingford. Winterbrook has been a part of Cholsey Parish since the 12th Century and various local referendums have confirmed the view of residents that this should remain the case.

Yours faithfully

[REDACTED]
Mark Gray
Chair. Cholsey PC

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

From: Du nkeyson, Nicholas
Sent: 08 May 2012 12:04
To: Du nkeyson, Nicholas
Subject: FW: Number of councillors for South Oxfordshire District Council
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Re d

From: grussell [REDACTED]
Sent: 08 May 2012 11:52
To: Reviews@
Subject: Number of councillors for South Oxfordshire District Council

My Council has asked me to send you the following comments:

The District Council's submission argues that 36 councillors is a sufficient number to the run the business of the council.

Although the current management system means that only 36 councillors are directly involved in running the business of the council, reducing the number of councillors to 36 could compromise the effective and democratic functioning of the council.

The current number of 48 councillors was established at a time when the council was run by a committee system. Reducing the council to 36 members could compromise any future council preference to return to a committee system.

The council's report submitted in evidence indicates that they have already pared down nominations to external bodies. Further reducing council numbers would compromise the ability to be involved with other bodies still further.

The report suggests that the representative role of councillors is less time consuming and that councillors could properly represent larger wards. There is little hard evidence offered to support this, only the suggestion that use of electronic communication means that there might be less pressure on councillors.

As a parish council we are particularly concerned about this issue. We hold monthly meetings, our district councillor is invited to attend and their presence is much appreciated. The district councillor's reports often provide personal insights and provoke important questions and discussion that might not otherwise arise. This informs our own work and gives us an understanding of the district council's work that goes beyond information that is submitted in any written report. It also allows the district councillor a better insight into the views and concerns of our parish, particularly with regard to the work of the district council. If district councillors were to have larger wards with more parishes this valuable representative role would be compromised, especially where rural parishes are spread over large geographical areas.

We are also concerned by the suggestion that some of the casework of district councillors be taken on by parish councillors. Firstly, this appears to contradict the suggestion that reducing the number of councillors will not affect their ability to deal with their representative role. Secondly, it assumes that parish councillors are both

willing and able to take this on. As a parish council we strongly question this assumption.

We look forward to receiving a copy of your report in due course.

Geoff Russell
Clerk
Dorchester-on-Thames Parish Council



Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sent: 08 May 2012 12:07

To: Reviews@

Subject: Number of councillors for South Oxfordshire District Council

My Council has asked me to send you the following comments:

My Council does not like the way in which this process has been divided into two. By keeping the consultation about the boundary changes out of the first stage there is an impression that the District Council would prefer that we do not think about the much larger areas that District Councillors will be expected to represent, once there are fewer of them, until it is too late to do anything about it.

My Council has always valued the attendance of the local District Councillor at our meetings and believes that such attendance is likely to be less frequent if the Councillor has more Parishes to look after. All the recent publicity about 'localism' suggests that Parish and District Councils should work more closely together in future than they have in the past – the District Council's proposal, however, will result in Parish Councils and the District Council becoming even more remote from each other.

We look forward to receiving a copy of your report in due course.

Geoff Russell
Clerk
Garsington Parish Council

[REDACTED]

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

From: Goring Parish Council [REDACTED]
Sent: 02 May 2012 13:57
To: Reviews@
Subject: Reduction of number of South Oxfordshire District Councillors from 48 to 36

Dear Sir,

I write to advise you that Goring Parish Council unanimously supported this recommendation by S.O.D.C. at their meeting on Monday 23rd April.

I trust you will note our support in this matter.

Peter Clegg
Clerk
Goring Parish Council
Old Jubilee Fire Station, Red Cross Road
Goring, Reading RG8 9HG
Phone: 01491 874444
Fax 01491 874487
clerk@goringpc.org

Find what you are looking for on our electronic notice board at:
<http://www.goringpc.org>

Response from Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council

Background

South Oxfordshire District Council has sought a review of the number of councillors, proposing a reduction in the size of Councillor numbers from 48 to 36. The undated letter from SODC to town and parish councils indicates that consideration has been given to the impact of the reduction in councillor numbers on representation – and does not see this as an issue. The letter does not indicate that one of the motivating factors for reducing the number of councillors is financial – however this must be the case as district councils come under pressure from central government to keep costs down.

Response

Having given consideration to this matter Nuneham Courtney Parish Council (NCPC) opposes the reduction in councillor numbers. We do not agree with SODC's assurances that representation will not be diminished for the following reasons:

- **Increase in the geographical area to be covered.** Our district councillor currently covers four parishes. Any reduction in councillor numbers must mean that the number of parishes that any councillor represents will increase. Where these cover a large geographical area (as in the case of rural parishes) any increase in the number of parishes represented must mean that a councillor will spend more time covering their 'patch' or give less time to each of the parishes. Councillors may be less aware of the issues in their 'patch' as a result and could even end up having to represent parishes that, through geographical distance, have differing views on the same issues;
- **Inability to provide acceptable back-up cover.** Our previous district councillor was absent from the area towards the end of her term. This meant that our parish was effectively unrepresented for nearly a year. It therefore fell to another councillor in the area to keep us informed – increasing her workload. This could happen again and if, as happened in this instance, the Council decides not to call for a by-election, more parishes could be left with diminished representation because there are fewer councillors to provide back up;
- **Need to maintain face to face relationships.** Whilst the SODC letter cites the move to electronic media as a positive reason for justifying a reduction in councillors, a number of parishioners do not wish to engage electronically, whether young or old. A reduction in numbers could leave certain sections of the community increasingly disenfranchised if they do not have the opportunities for face to face representation. There is no sense to which electronic media reduces or eases workload – it creates new pressures on priorities and time, and, sometimes reduces the ability to fully understand or assess issues. NCPC maintains there is still a need for councillors to have the time to properly engage with the parishes and constituents on a face to face basis;
- **Impact on the type of people who would be prepared to stand as councillors.** If councillor workload is increased as a result of a reduction in numbers, and NCPC argues that it must be, then this would suggest that either district councillors will not fully apply themselves to their workloads, or that those standing as councillors will be those who have time to give up to properly deal with council matters. This may make it difficult for young people, those with jobs, or with family commitments, to put themselves forward – the upshot being that a reduction in councillor numbers creates a district council that is less reflective of the demographic profile of its district.

Whilst NCPC recognises the desire to reduce costs and its impact on Council Tax payers, it does not believe that a significant reduction in councillors offers value for money in terms of the potential for a poorer level of representation of all members of the district.

Impact on ward boundaries

Whilst the consultation does not call for comments on boundary changes at this stage, it really is impossible to consider the impact of a reduction in numbers without fully understanding the impact upon the shape of future wards. We therefore would ask that the number issue is kept reviewed during the next stage of consultation to avoid an arbitrary assignment of parishes against a pre-determined number of councillors when a minor increase or decrease might better align the number of representatives and the geographical areas they represent.

During the next stage of consultation NCPC expects to ask LBGCE that any review of boundaries in this area better reflects the geographical and social ties with neighbouring parishes. In the recent review of Oxfordshire County Council the current County ward boundary was amended so that the parishes of Marsh and Toot Baldon and Nuneham Courtenay were brought together in the same ward, as many of our concerns are similar. We expect to be making the same case at the next stage of this consultation process.

Colin George on behalf of Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council

8 May 2012

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

From: Heather Mullins [REDACTED]
Sent: 02 May 2012 16:45
To: Reviews@
Subject: Electoral Review of South Oxfordshire

Dear Sirs,

Further to your letter of 27th March regarding the electoral review of South Oxfordshire we would like to express our support of the proposal from South Oxfordshire District Council. We are in favour of their recommendations to reduce the number of councillors.

Yours faithfully,

Heather Mullins
on behalf of
Sydenham Parish Council
parish.council@sydenhamvillage.net

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

From: reviews@lgbce.org.uk [mailto:reviews@lgbce.org.uk]
Sent: 18 April 2012 16:10
To: Reviews@
Subject: Custom Form Submission Received



- Custom Form Submission Notification

Custom Form Submission Received

Review Editor,

A new custom form submission has been received. The details of the form submission are as follows:

Submission Information

Custom Form: Online submissions form (#183)
Form URL: <http://www.lgbce.org.uk/current-consultations/online-submissions-form>
Submission ID: 1043
Time of Submission: Apr 18th 2012 at 3:10pm
IP Address: [Redacted]

Form Answers

Name: Thame Town Council
Address 1: Town Hall, High Street
Address 2: Thame
Address 3: Oxfordshire
Postcode: OX9 3DP
Email Address: oss@thametowncouncil.gov.uk
Area your submission refers to: South Oxfordshire
Organisation you belong to: parish/town council
Your feedback: Minute from Planning Meeting minutes, 17 April 2012:

"Following discussion it was agreed that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England should be informed that although Thame Town Council was not in a position to comment fully, in priciple Members considered that market towns should retain their four Councillors.

RESOLVED: That the Local Government Boundary Commission be informed that Thame Town Council considered that South Oxfordshire's market towns should retain their quota of four Councillors.

File upload:

This communication is from **LGBCE** (<http://www.lgbce.org.uk>) - Sent to **Review Editor**

Waterstock Parish Meeting

waterstockparish@camcott.co.uk: chairman michael tyce

19.4.12

Nicholas Dunkeyson
Review Officer
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
LONDON
EC1M 5LG

Dear Mr Dunkeyson

Re Electoral review of South Oxfordshire

The proposal to reduce the number of Councillors from 48 to 36 was considered at a full Parish Meeting on 16th April.

Although the Meeting welcomes proposals for cost reduction in general, it was feared that the relatively minor savings involved – estimated by the Councillor present at around £36,000 a year – were outweighed by the damage to local democracy that would be risked, particularly in relation to rural areas like our own.

The Meeting had the following comments which we trust you will take into account:

1. There was considerable concern that the increase in Councillor's ward sizes which a reduction in numbers would entail would lead to a democratic deficit. Although this would be to an extent offset by improved modern communications (although our area in fact has woeful internet speeds) , it was felt that Councillors were already stretched to understand and represent the concerns of their electorate. This is particularly the case in rural areas such as our own, where a Councillor has to represent a number of separate and individual communities, more so than in urban areas where a Councillor represents a section of a largely homogeneous whole. It is harder to represent any particular number of people in the country than in a town, not least because of the travel implications. The Commission is asked to look particularly carefully at whether a reduction of Councillors in rural areas is appropriate at all, and certainly that it should not be pro rata to the reduction in urban areas.
2. Related to the above point it was noted that whilst modest expenses are receivable, Councillors are unpaid, and may not be willing to devote the extra time, particularly in rural areas that maintaining present levels of representation would require.

If they do maintain those levels then the predicted savings from a reduction in numbers, already apparently relatively trivial in the context of the whole District may not materialise, as individual expenses will increase, or at least not to the extent expected.

3. The County Council has already made a similar reduction and our own County Councillor (who is a member of one of the main parties) advised that in his view the creation of larger wards had made it far more difficult for independent candidates to stand, and correspondingly increased the power of parties. The purpose of a Local Councillor is to represent local not party views, and any increase in the power of parties would inevitably adversely affect this role.
4. Additionally a reduction in the number of Councillors relative to officers risks further increasing the control of officers over affairs, whereas the intention of democratic representation is that power should lie with the people not the staff.

We hope you will take these considered remarks into account.

We are also asked to express a view as to where, if there is a Boundary Change, Waterstock would prefer to be located. We consider that our closest affiliation lies with Waterperry and Forest Hill, and would wish to be with them in any future grouping.

Many thanks

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Michael Tyce.

Michael Tyce
Chairman, Waterstock Parish Meeting

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

From: Wheatley Parish Clerk [REDACTED]
Sent: 08 May 2012 16:34
To: Reviews@
Subject: Review -South Oxfordshire

Dear Sir

Consultation on the Council size of South Oxfordshire – reduction in number of District Council Councillors from 48 to 36.

Wheatley Parish Council believes that the status quo should be maintained i.e. the council size should remain at 48.

It believes that 'localism' should not mean fewer local councillors and larger wards.

Yours sincerely

Gareth Morris
Clerk to Wheatley Parish Council

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]

From: Woodcote Parish Council [REDACTED]
Sent: 24 April 2012 12:06
To: Reviews@
Subject: Electoral Review South Oxfordshire

Dear Sirs,

I am submitting the views from Woodcote Parish Council regarding the review, the Parish Council do not feel that the review is in the best interest of the residents of South Oxfordshire for the following reasons;

Cost savings achieved would be minimal.
Cost savings could be better achieved in other areas.
Wards decided purely by the density number, not accounting for "local" identities.
Smaller villages have lower density so they would lose their voice as they would not be represented by a District Councillor who was specific to their area.
Large towns such as Didcot with higher density would have more representation.
Increase of workload for District Councillors, this would likely lead to less people being willing to put themselves forward to become a District Councillor, especially if still in employment, therefore the diversity of candidates would be changed.

Regards
Jenny Welham
Parish Clerk
Woodcote Parish Council

[REDACTED] on our website
www.woodcote-online.co.uk

Dunkeyson, Nicholas

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: Harry Butterworth [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 April 2012 15:51
To: Reviews@
Subject: Local representation

District Council representation.

Whitchurch on Thames Parish currently shares two District councillors with Goring Parish. The practicality is that the two councillors concentrate on one Parish each.

The councillor concentrating on Whitchurch on Thames is Pearl Slatter. Whether people agree or disagree with her in this context has no relevance. What matters in this context is that she puts in something like 30 hours per week for the Village.

If the number of councillors in SODC is reduced this will mean either she puts in more hours or she has to spread her available effort more thinly.

People who are willing (let alone those who can afford) to put in anywhere near that number of hours are very hard to find as it is. So inevitably they are for the most part retired people and the younger members (under 60's!) of our communities are only indirectly represented.

The reduction in councillors would make that situation worse.

Parish Council Boundaries and representation

Our Southern Oxfordshire Villages do have very distinct individual characters and the boundaries are easily defined and distinct. This is reflected in local attitudes to everything from doggy bins to building infill. We do find we have more affinity with Goring, as a Riverside Village associated with a major (3000 vehicle crossings each way each day) River crossing, than with, say, Goring Heath. It also makes sense of the way in which our two representatives split their available effort, specialising on one Village each. I find that it leads to a much better understanding of the needs of their chosen village.

Harry Butterworth

Chairman, Whitchurch on Thames Parish Council