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Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment

Representative of a community group/organisation

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"Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment (SPADE) is a formally constituted local campaigning organisation. It has been active for a number of years most notably in actively engaging in District, County and South East planning matters. SPADE believes that local representative democracy is key in ensuring that planning and infrastructure issues are effectively managed for the benefit of local communities.

SPADE therefore welcomes the opportunity to comment and supports the principle that proposals should be based on existing parish council boundaries, aligned as far as is possible with County Council Divisions and paying due regard, but not absolute deference, to ensuring electoral fairness and minimisation of population variance.

However, we strongly believe that using population as the primary determinant of ward size is less appropriate for rural communities than those in urban areas. We accept that in rural areas several communities will need to be aggregated in order to satisfy the population criterion for district wards; however, we would argue that the commonalities of interests and identities of these communities should be considered to be of at least equal, if not greater, significance than a strict population count in determining ward boundaries. This will require a less prescriptive approach to population count than that which may be appropriate in urban areas or as proposed by the Commission.

SPADE are concerned that differing options, not reflecting the status quo, have been proposed for the Sunningwell area by the DC and then by the LGBCE which seem to be justified only on the basis of population with little or no evidence that either of the proposals reflect that commonality of interests of the communities concerned.

The most recent LGBCE proposal creates a multi (3) member ward containing Sunningwell, part of North Hinksey, South Hinksey, part of Boars Hill, Radley and Kennington. SPADE considers this has distinct drawbacks in ensuring direct representation and identification of one, or at most two, elected members for the area concerned. SPADE does not believe that there is any justification for a three member ward which seems to be based on minimising variance rather than identification of commonalities of interest. It should be noted that VWHDC elect on a once every 4 years basis and not in thirds which further weakens any perceived benefit of such a multi member ward structure.

SPADE therefore proposes an approach which builds on the original proposals by combining both the original VWHDC and the revised LGBCE proposals. SPADE

believes that this approach gives far greater prominence the commonality of interest argument.

It therefore is proposed that two, 2 member wards are created based on:-

- o Kennington and Radley, (est. pop in 2018, 5,380) and
- o Wootton, Sunningwell, Boarâ€™s Hill and the Hinkseys (est. pop in 2018, 5,130)

Whilst based primarily on commonality of interests, the variance is minimised by the retention of 2 member wards and reflects the original VWHDC proposal for a 2 member Kennington and Radley ward.

The proposal is supported by the submissions to the VWHDC initial proposals in which both Radley and Kennington Parish Councils identified each other as logical partners, avoiding the potential for the splitting of Kennington into 2 separate wards or the absorption of Radley into the greater Abingdon area.

The villages of Sunningwell, Boarâ€™s Hill and Wootton are essentially rural in character, reinforcing the common identity, whereas Kennington, with Radley as its satellite, is much larger and has more of the character of a small town.

Wootton , Sunningwell and the Hinkseys are all members of the Oxfordshire Greenbelt Network, share many of the same concerns over infrastructure provision, flooding issues and the minimising of congestion associated with access to and egress from the A34.

The settlements of Sunningwell, Bayworth, Boarâ€™s Hill and Wootton are contiguous and their communities share a common identity. Although they also share boundaries with Kennington and Radley, these communities are separate and do not share in that common identity.

The proposal removes the splitting of the Boarâ€™s Hill area into 2 distinct and separate wards as would result from the LGBCE proposal. Boarâ€™s Hill has historic involvement and commonalities with Wootton, Sunningwell and the Hinkseys either due to access routes being from these three communities or by the provision of local facilities (e.g. shopping) or local governance to the residents of the Boarâ€™s Hill area.

SPADE notes that other communitiesâ€™ representatives and political parties have in the past made alternative suggestions regarding Sunningwellâ€™s inclusion in other multi member wards. However, those proposals are only justified in supporting text by benefits gained by other parties with none being identified for Sunningwell and its residents. SPADE therefore strongly rejects those proposals.

In conclusion, SPADE commends the Wootton, Sunningwell, Boarâ€™s Hill and the Hinkseys 2 member ward proposal as the one that best allows the rural communities of North East Vale of White Horse District Council to express their shared identity and interests through the ballot box, rather than one whose only merit is a slavish adherence to a speculative population count.

Robert Warne  
Chair SPADE  
Sunningwell Parishioners Against Damage to the Environment  
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