30th March 2017

Dear Sir or Madam

REVIEW OF WARD BOUNDARIES, WEST BERKSHIRE

I wish to comment on the proposed new ward boundaries for the West Berkshire District area. For the most part I am happy with the proposals agreed by the West Berkshire District Council on Thursday 23rd March. There are however, two slight adjustments I would like you to consider in relation to the Thatcham and Cold Ash wards as proposed by the West Berks District Council (WBDC). maps enclosed.

My first suggestion relates to a small area between the Thatcham West Ward and the Cold Ash Ward. My second suggestion relates to a small area between the Thatcham South & Central Ward and the Thatcham East Ward.

1) I base my suggestion for an alteration in the proposed ward boundary in the vicinity of the parish boundary between Thatcham and Cold Ash parishes on two of your guideline principles, namely,

Parishes: in areas where parishes exist, the parish boundaries often represent the extent of a community. In fact, the Commission often uses parishes as the building blocks of wards and electoral divisions.

Delivering electoral equality for local voters - this means ensuring that each local councillor represents roughly the same number of people so that the value of your vote is the same regardless of where you live in the local authority area.

Thatcham West ward as proposed includes a small part of Cold Ash Parish containing 106 electors. This small area is indicated 'A' in pink on the enclosed map of the proposed new wards. The current boundary between Thatcham and Cold Ash parishes in this area is clearly identified by a road. This has been the parish boundary for hundreds of years and is well understood by local residents. If the ward boundary were to be drawn where recommended by the West Berks District Council, it would cut across the parish boundary (between Cold Ash and Thatcham). This would result in the residents in the area indicated being served by a Thatcham District west ward councillor for District matters and by Cold Ash Parish councillors for Parish matters. Furthermore the Thatcham west ward councillor would need to attend Cold Ash Parish Council meetings as well as Thatcham Town Council meetings, in order to do his job well. I maintain that such an inclusion of that part of Cold Ash parish with Thatcham West would serve no useful purpose whatsoever and would actually act against electoral equality.

Electoral Equality

Considering the number of electors per councillor, I quote hereunder the figures of the currently proposed wards as stated by WBDC and yourselves. The mean number of electors per councillor, based on the entire district (124,492 divided by 42 councillors) is 2,964 under the proposed new scheme.

WBDC PROPOSALS

Thatcham West
Cold Ash

6,497 This gives 3,249 per councillor = 9.6% OVER
5,733 This gives 2,867 per councillor = 3.3% UNDER
MY SUGGESTION

Thatcham West 6,497 - 106 = 6,391 gives 3,196 per councillor = 7.8% OVER
Cold Ash 5,733 + 106 = 5,839 gives 2,920 per councillor = 1.5% UNDER

Hence, my proposal would appear to be better on electoral equality and would avoid a crossing of the parish boundary.

I would add that about 50 homes are currently under construction in Thatcham West Ward, which reinforces my view that this ward does not need electors from Cold Ash Parish.

(2) I should now like to draw your attention to the other two proposed wards for Thatcham, namely Thatcham Central & South and Thatcham East. My suggestion for a slight change in this case is based entirely on electoral equality between these two wards.

WBDC PROPOSALS

Thatcham Central & South 6,573. This gives 3,287 per councillor = 10.9% OVER
Thatcham East 6,070. This gives 3,035 per councillor = 2.4% OVER

Both these wards as proposed by WBDC have clear highway boundaries as proposed. You may consider that the elector-councillor ratios fall within or near your permitted tolerances but the balance would be improved if a small section were to be transferred from Central & South Ward to East Ward. This would involve the transfer of about 281 electors according to my calculations (Station Road northern side west of The Moors 14, Chapel St south side west of The Moors 19, Green Lane east side 18, Cedar Grove 18, Meadow Close 110, Church Gate north side 9, Church Lane 15, High St 32, Broadway 15, Whybrow Close 8, south side of Bath Road between Chapel St & Green Lane 23. This transfer would provide a better electoral balance between the two wards as shown hereunder. The area in question is marked B in pink on the map enclosed.

MY SUGGESTION

Thatcham Central & South 6,573 - 281 = 6,292 gives 3,146 per councillor = 6.1% OVER
Thatcham East 6,070 + 281 = 6,351 gives 3,175 per councillor = 7.1% OVER

This new boundary, which I am suggesting, would be easily identifiable (continuing along Station Road from point ‘A’, along middle of Church Gate, up middle of Green Lane to the A4 where it would join the other boundary line of Central & South Ward). This change would provide an improved electoral equality ratio. Both wards would then be less than 10% above the base figure of 2,964 per councillor.

Finally

THE WARD NAMES

Whilst writing I would like to support the names suggested by the WBDC for the proposed Thatcham Wards. They clearly indicate the approximate location of the respective wards and are similar to the existing ward names, with which electors are familiar.

However, regarding the proposed new Cold Ash Ward, I notice that it incorporates the parishes of Shaw-cum-Donnington, Cold Ash, Hermitage, Frilsham and Yattendon. I suggest the name of Grimsbury for this ward. Grimsbury Castle is an identifiable site of an iron age fortress (in Hermitage Parish) and is situated almost in the centre of the proposed new ward. I have indicated it on an enclosed map of the proposed ward.

I hope that you will find my suggestions helpful in your deliberations.

Yours faithfully

Review Officer (West Berkshire), Local Government Boundary Commission for England
14th Floor Millbank Tower, Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP