The proposals re warding patterns for West Berkshire were discussed by East Garston Parish Council on 5th July 2017 and Councillors have asked that I represent the views of the Parish Council to you.

Councillors were unanimous in their views and informal contact with parishioners suggests a similar view.

The proposal to make changes to the ward boundaries in order to make the District Councillor/population ratio more equitable is understood and in principle supported as is the desire to have a more affordable/normalised District Councillor population. However it is the view of the Parish Council that this should not only be treated as a statistical/mathematical exercise.

The commission is required to conclude a balance of the following criteria

- To deliver electoral equality where each councillor represents roughly the same number of electors as others across West Berkshire.
- That the pattern of wards should, as far as possible, reflect the interests and identities of local communities.
- That the electoral arrangements should provide for effective and convenient local government.

From the perspective of the Parish of East Garston it is believed that the second criteria is not being taken into sufficient account in the current proposals.

- Whilst the Parish of East Garston is small compared with neighbouring Lambourn it has a cultural affinity with Lambourn through the horseracing industry.
- Lambourn is the key Service Centre for East Garston providing shops, pharmacy, doctors surgery, post office, library etc.
- The Church Benefice of the Lambourn Valley comprises solely of churches in the Civil Parishes of Lambourn and East Garston.
- East Garston Parish Council has traditionally supported and shared funding for "Valley" Community facilities and services such as the Community Bus Service to Wantage.
- East Garston Parish Council recently considered the development of a Neighbourhood Plan in conjunction with Lambourn Parish Council, this has been put on hold pending the outcome of this review. Whilst there is no certainty that it would go ahead, the prospect of a Neighbourhood Plan together with Lambourn is far more likely to happen and be beneficial to the community than one by East Garston alone or in conjunction with many other small parishes.

It is therefore the opinion of East Garston Parish Council that their constituents and community would be better served by continuing to be part of a "Lambourn" Ward rather than being bundled with 13 other disparate and distant communities (Downlands) with no symbiosis. Councillors understand that this bends the arithmetic slightly and that they may become a minnow in the shadow of Lambourn, however on balance they believe that this would be a preferred solution.
Councillors trust that you will take their views into account and of course will happily provide further evidence if required.

regards

Alan

Alan Breadmore
Clerk to East Garston Parish Council