

Local Government
Boundary Commission
For England
Report No.512

Parish Review

BOROUGH OF WALSALL

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BOUNDARY COMMISSION

FOR ENGLAND

REPORT NO. **512**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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THE RIGHT HON. KENNETH BAKER MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

1. In accordance with the responsibilities imposed by section 48(8) of the Local Government Act 1972, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council conducted a parish review and reported to us on 3 September 1982. The Borough is at present completely unparished and the Borough Council's report recommends that no parishes should be created.
2. We considered the Borough Council's report and associated comments in accordance with the requirements of section 48(9) of the 1972 Act together with the representations made direct to us by the bodies and individuals listed at Schedule A. Copies of the Borough Council's report together with copies of the representations are being sent separately to your Department.
3. Although we were satisfied that the review had been carried out in accordance with the requirements of section 60 of the Act we had some reservations about the extent to which the procedure followed could be regarded as an adequate test of public opinion in an area unfamiliar with parish government. There were indications of a lack of widespread consultation with local interests and there had been only a limited attempt by the Borough Council to explain the role of parishes. This might have led to local feeling not emerging fully.
4. Moreover, the Borough Council's decision not to recommend the creation of parishes seemed to ignore the public support for parishes in the area of Pelsall and High Heath, as demonstrated by surveys carried out by the Pelsall Neighbourhood Council; over 1,200 residents of High Heath and more than 400 residents in Central Pelsall had been recorded as favouring the establishment of a parish. Following receipt of the Borough Council's report we received further representations from the Pelsall and High Heath Liberal Association, the Pelsall Neighbourhood Council and one local resident in support of a parish in Pelsall. Two other individuals wrote in support of parishes generally.

OUR OWN REVIEW AND DRAFT PROPOSALS

5. Only marginal interest had been shown in most areas of the Borough in the possibility of parishing and bearing in mind the guidelines contained in Department of the Environment Circular 121/77 we were disposed to accept the Borough Council's recommendations in those areas. However in view of the degree of doubt about the Pelsall and High Heath areas and as a means of securing further discussion, we decided that we should exercise the powers conferred on us by section 48(9) of the 1972 Act and review these areas ourselves for the purpose of considering whether or not it would be desirable, in the interests of effective and convenient local government, for parishes to be established. We decided to publish draft proposals at the same time as we announced our intention to carry out a review.
6. We noted that although Pelsall Neighbourhood Council had suggested the creation of a combined parish of Pelsall and High Heath, these areas were in fact separated by a railway line and by open land. We also noted that an area known as Shelfield was continuous with High Heath, and considered that if High Heath were to be parished it might be appropriate to include Shelfield; the views of the local inhabitants on this point were, however, unknown to us. We therefore decided to publish draft proposals for the creation of two parishes, one to be called Pelsall and the other, High Heath and Shelfield, as a focus for discussion.
7. On 20 October 1983 we issued a consultation letter announcing the start of the review and publishing our draft proposals. The proposed Parish of Pelsall covered the part of the Pelsall district ward west of the railway line and the proposed Parish of High Heath and Shelfield comprised the remaining part of the ward, together with the Shelfield area of the Hatherton Rushall ward. Our draft proposals also contained details of warding arrangements for the new parishes. The proposed Parish of Pelsall would have been divided into four wards to be represented by 16 parish councillors as follows: Heath End - four councillors, Central - five councillors, Wood - three councillors, and Commons - four councillors. The proposed Parish of High Heath and Shelfield would have been divided into two wards to be represented by a total of 13

parish councillors, as follows - High Heath, eight councillors and Shelfield, five councillors.

8. The letter was addressed to Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council; copies were sent to West Midlands Metropolitan County Council, the Members of Parliament for the constituencies concerned, the headquarters of the main political parties, the editors of local newspapers circulating in the Borough and the local government press, local radio and TV stations serving the area, the West Midlands Association for Neighbourhood Councils, Pelsall Neighbourhood Council and other local bodies and individuals known to be interested in the review. Notices in the local press announced the start of the review and invited comments on the draft proposals and the general question of parishing the area from members of the public and interested bodies by 20 December.

THE RESPONSE TO OUR DRAFT PROPOSALS

9. Letters from 82 sources, signed in all by 110 people, were received in response to our consultation letter; a list of those who commented is provided at Schedule B to this report. Almost all the letters related directly to our draft proposals: only six commented on the desirability of creating parishes in other parts of the Borough, and of those only one person believed they should be established in all areas of Walsall.

10. Our draft proposals were supported by the Clerk and the Chairman of Pelsall Neighbourhood Council and by Pelsall and High Heath Liberal Association; they had encouraged residents to make their views known to us and suggested that we should hold public meetings to inform residents about parishes and to ascertain the majority view. Nineteen residents wrote in support, mainly on the grounds that Pelsall and High Heath were distinct local communities and that greater local involvement through elected parish councils was both feasible and desirable. There was dissatisfaction with the standard of local authority services, including the neighbourhood offices operated by the Borough Council, and a feeling that parish councils would be a cost-effective way of improving them.

11. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council said that they had conducted the original review as fully and fairly as possible and regretted our decision to review the Pelsall and High Heath areas ourselves. They maintained that there was insufficient support for parishes and stated that they already provided a range of facilities in the area akin to those which might be available through a parish council. They explained that they offered a wide range of recreational services in Pelsall, and had created Pelsall North Common as an amenity, from derelict land. They had set up community associations based on Pelsall and Shelfield Comprehensive Schools and had involved the local inhabitants as far as possible with local planning and development control. Their policy was to provide decentralised services, particularly with regard to housing and social services, through a network of neighbourhood offices, of which there was one in Pelsall and one in High Heath/Shelfield. They pointed out that as the Borough's expenditure was already above government targets the creation of parishes in specific areas could have implications, through the possible loss of block grant, for ratepayers throughout the Borough.

12. Opposition to our draft proposals came additionally from Pelsall Civic Society and the majority of the private individuals who wrote to us. Pelsall Civic Society believed it was in a position to raise matters of local concern with the Borough Council through local councillors. Many of the private individuals, including 54 who signed copies of a standard letter of objection, thought the creation of parishes would result in additional rates and an unnecessary extra tier of local government. Some indicated satisfaction with the local services and amenities provided by Walsall Borough Council. It was suggested that the impetus for parishing had come from Pelsall Neighbourhood Council and had not been sustained. One of the three Borough Councillors for the Pelsall ward said there was no need for a parish council and much opposition to one locally. Another Councillor said that while in favour of parish councils in principle, he would not expect these to be imposed on areas showing little or no enthusiasm. The MP for the Aldridge-Brownhills constituency stated that he was satisfied local opinion was overwhelmingly against a parish for Pelsall.

OUR FINAL CONCLUSIONS

13. We have reassessed our draft proposals in the light of all these comments. While we remain satisfied that Pelsall and High Heath are identifiable communities and that there was, at the time of issuing our draft proposals, a case for parishing them, the support for parishes then evident has not been sustained. Only a small proportion of Pelsall and High Heath residents have written to us, and none of the three people writing from Shelfield wished that area to be parished. We have been urged to hold local meetings to ascertain public opinion, but we do not believe that a local meeting would provide us with information not already available.

14. We do not accept the Borough Council's argument that the quality of their services and a policy of decentralisation would leave parish councils with no genuine role in local government. If a sustained level of support had been demonstrated we would have pursued our proposals for parishing. However our review has not revealed the weight of support now that would justify proposals contrary to the Borough Council's recommendation. As a result of our own review, therefore, we have decided to make no proposals for parishes.

PUBLICATION

15. A letter is being sent with copies of this report to Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council asking them in accordance with section 60(5)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, to place the copies on deposit at their main offices, and to place notices to this effect on public notice boards and in the local press. The text of the notice will suggest that any comments on the Commission's report should be addressed to you, in writing, preferably within six weeks of the date of the letter. Copies of this report are also being sent to those who

received the consultation letter and to those who made comments.

LS

SIGNED: G J ELLERTON (Chairman)

J G POWELL (Deputy Chairman)

JOAN ACKNER

TYRRELL BROCKBANK

G E CHERRY

K J L NEWELL

B SHOLES

S T GARRISH

Secretary

14 November 1985

SCHEDULE A

The following bodies/individuals wrote to the Commission following submission of the parish review report by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council:

West Midlands County Council

Pelsall Neighbourhood Council

Association for Neighbourhood Councils - West Midlands County Group

Pelsall and High Heath Liberal Association

Four private , individuals

The following bodies/individuals commented on the Commission's draft proposals:

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Councillor W Clayton

Councillor S Evans

Pelsall Civic Society

Pelsall and High Heath Liberal Association

79 letters were received from private individuals

