

Electoral Review of Stafford Borough Council Area

Stafford Borough Council Independent Group Submission on Proposed New Ward Boundaries

I am writing to you as leader of the Independent Group on Stafford Borough Council concerning possible ward boundary changes to the Stafford Borough Council area to accommodate the proposed reduction in Councillor numbers.

On 19th December, the Council's preferred changes to the boundaries were discussed and approved, and as such will be submitted to you as representing the views of the Council. I must point out that, as you will see from the minutes of that meeting, this is not the case and indeed the option put forward by the Council represents only the views of the Conservative Controlling Group. A name vote at the meeting showed that all the other non-Conservative Councillors voted against this proposal regardless of political group or affiliation. Indeed in any of the cross-political working groups which were established to agree this proposal any suggestions put forward by any non-Conservative councillors were rejected with little or no discussion. With this in mind the Independent Group have reservations with the proposal which we believe has been arrived at for political gain rather than ensuring community interests are the driving factor.

With this in mind we would like to draw your attention particular to one anomaly – namely the Council's suggested new Church Eaton and Seighford Ward which in its current form has been drawn up purely to ensure the ward is, according to the Conservative Group, "served by two Councillors so the workload can be shared" and not to recognize the communities involved. Indeed the Council's supporting document for this new warding arrangement makes no mention of community interests but only describes the new boundaries as a reason for putting forward the proposal.

The Independent Group would therefore like to propose that this new ward is split in two, with each half being served by one Councillor. This position was indeed suggested as a possibility by the Borough Council's officers at the first meeting of the Boundary Review Working Group.

The current Church Eaton Ward (2013) has 1787 voters (+7%) and is served by one Councillor – Independent.

It is made up of three rural parishes:

Bradley (CEA) (2013 – 366 voters)

Church Eaton (CEB) (2013 - 498 voters)

Haughton (CEC) (2013 – 923 voters)

The current Seighford Ward (2013) has 2927 (-12%) voter and is served by two Conservative Councillors.

It is made up of a mixture of nine rural and semi urban parishes:

Creswell (SFA) (2013 2013 – 288)

Ellenhall (SFB) (2013 – 106)

Hyde Lea (SFC) (2013 – 387)

Marston (SFD) (2013 – 131)
Ranton (SFE) (2013 – 319)
Seighford / Derrington (SFF) (2013 – 737)
Seighford / Great Bridgeford (SFG) (2013 – 615)
Seighford / Seighford (SFH) (2013 – 177)
Whitgreave (SFI) (2013 – 167)

It is therefore proposed that the current Church Eaton Ward (Polling Districts CEA, CEB, CEC) be extended by the addition of the parishes of Ranton (Polling District SFE – 337 voters (2019)) and Hyde Lea (Polling District SFC - 387 voters (2019)). Both these polling districts are current part of the existing Seighford Ward.

The new Church Eaton Ward, with the addition of the two polling districts suggested above would provide a voter to Councillor ratio of 2629 to 1. (+3.2%)

The new Seighford Ward (Polling Districts SFA, SFB, SFD, SFF, SFG, SFH) would provide a voter to Councillor ratio of 2626 to 1. (+ 3.1%)

The Borough Council's proposal for the new Seighford and Church Eaton Ward does however suggest that Marston Parish is transferred from the existing Seighford Ward to the new Milwich Ward. The Independent Group has no view on this move which only affects 141 voters (2019). If this is adopted this would reduce the proposed single member Seighford Ward to 2485 voters. (-2.4%).

In making this proposal to divide the new Seighford and Church Eaton Ward in to two one member wards the following points have been taken into consideration:

The combined Seighford and Church Eaton ward as proposed by the Council, takes no account of community interests. It is difficult to understand how the hamlet of Marston to the south of Church Eaton has anything in common with the communities of Great Bridgeford and Creswell and even less with the new development currently being constructed north of Beaconside opposite the Parkside estate. To travel from Marston in the south of the proposed ward to Creswell in the north is only possible by either narrow country lanes or by traveling into and out of Stafford town. The distance via the lanes is just under 15 miles, while via Stafford town centre is 13 miles. Facilities such as shops and post office only exist in Haughton and as such these are used by the residents of Church Eaton Parish as their local facilities. As an alternative to using the Haughton facilities residents travel either to Stafford or Gnosall. Church Eaton, Bradley, and Haughton are served by their own public houses which also help to further the sense of community identity, No facilities of this type exist in the current Seighford Ward.

By dividing this proposed ward into two overcomes this lack of community identity and long traveling distances, while still maintaining the target voter to Councillor ratio.

The proposal to add Ranton Parish (Polling District SFE) to the existing Church Eaton Ward acknowledges the importance of the community for the following reasons:

- i) Both villages are rural communities surrounded by farm land with similar problems, concerns, and inspirations.
- ii) The village of Ranton is situated just 2.5 miles north of Haughton – the largest community in Church Eaton Ward.
- iii) The main signed access to Ranton is from the A518 in the centre of Haughton.
- iv) The County Council's sponsored bus service 483 runs via Haughton to Ranton and links both villages with Stafford.
- v) The majority of children from Ranton Infant School transfer to Haughton St Giles Primary School at the age of eight.
- vi) There are no shops or public houses in Ranton Parish. The nearest shops, post office, and public houses (x2) are located in Haughton and are used as the local facilities for Ranton residents.
- vii) The Parish Councils of Ranton and Haughton are served by the same Parish Clerk.

The proposal to add Hyde Lea Parish (Polling District SFC) to the existing Church Eaton Ward also acknowledges the community links that exist while recognizing that because of its location Hyde Lea is remote from the rest of the existing Seighford Ward, especially Great Bridgeford, Cresswell, and Whitgreave. With this in mind it is proposed to add Hyde Lea Parish to Church Eaton Ward for the following reasons.

- i) While Hyde Lea Parish is only divided from the urban area of Stafford by the M6 motorway it does consider itself a rural parish, with the small settlement of Hyde Lea surrounded by open countryside made up of scattered farms some of which have land that cross the parish boundary into Bradley Parish.
- ii) There is no direct access from Hyde Lea Parish to the rest of Seighford Ward. Traffic to and from the parish either goes via the urban area of Stafford, through lanes to the adjoining South Staffordshire District Council area, or along country lanes to Haughton.
- iii) Because of its location the residents of Hyde Lea Parish face the same problems, concerns, and inspirations as those of the adjacent rural Bradley and Haughton Parishes.

Following the combining of the existing Ranton and Hyde Lea Parishes with the existing Church Eaton Ward the remaining area of Seighford Ward would maintain its current sense of community based around the communities of Derrington, Seighford, Great Bridgeford and Creswell. As all these communities lack shops, and in most cases public houses they all tend to look towards Stafford town to which they are not only directly linked but also closely located, rather than each other. As existing parishes within the current Seighford Ward it is suggested that residents would not see this new warding pattern as detrimental as it would bring no changes to their current lives or the way in which they interact with the Borough Council.

Stafford District

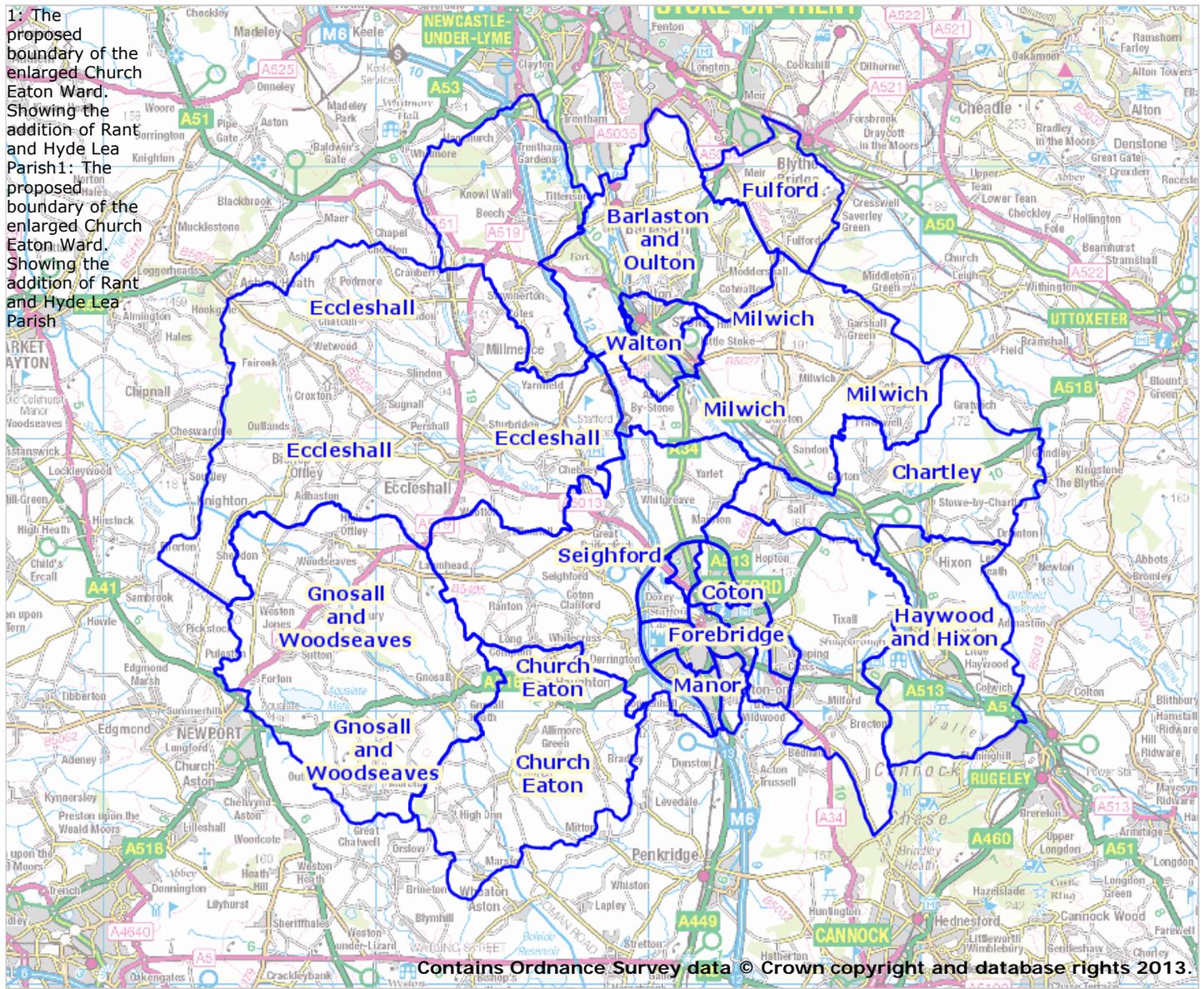
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