

JO KING
CLERK TO YARPOLE GROUP PARISH COUNCIL



29 December 2012

Review Officer (Herefordshire Review)
The Local Govt Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG

Dear Review Officer,

These are the comments from Yarpole Group Parish Council, representing the Parishes of Yarpole, Croft & Bircher, and Lucton, in the North Herefordshire Ward of Bircher (Councillor Sebastian Bowen). Yarpole Group Councillors will also write separately, but these are the comments offered by me as Clerk to Yarpole Group PC, and reflect the main views of the Parish Council.

1. Richards Castle:

I understand the aim of equalising the number of electors represented by each ward councillor, and your intention to keep each ward within a 10% variance band. However, this could be an exercise which on paper represents democratic process, but in practice serves to disenfranchise certain constituents. Yarpole Group Parish Council believes that removing Richards Castle from the present Bircher Ward would represent a huge loss of representation for its residents.

On your map of the 'Kingsland' ward area, you can see how Richards Castle is carved out from the top of the ward, now appearing as a protruding arm from the neighbouring 'Mortimer' ward. Wigmore, the nearest significant village to RC in the Mortimer Ward, is a 6.6 mile drive (15 minutes) over/through very hilly and winding landscape on C roads, often impassable in winter months and during snows and floods. The alternative is to travel on the B roads, ironically via Orleton & Lucton in the 'Kingsland' Ward, which is a 10.7 mile journey, taking 18 minutes. And why would you travel from Richards Castle to Wigmore? To go to the primary school? No, the catchment school for RC is Orleton, which is 1.9 miles (4 minutes) away. To go to the doctor? No, the local practice is in Orleton, 4 minutes away. To go to the local shop? No, again, the local shop is in Orleton, or Yarpole, or Kingsland. I suppose habits could change, but geography cannot. It just does not work. Can you explain how being represented by a ward councillor who supports Mortimer Ward would ever be of relevance to a resident of Richards Castle? What part of RCs infrastructure is served by anything happening in Mortimer Ward? On paper it may seem that you are 'equalising the number of electors' and therefore strengthening democracy, but in reality you are doing quite the opposite.

We believe that community identity is far more important than equalising numbers of electors. What is the point of equalising the number of electors when they are the wrong electors? And how does this 'provide for effective and convenient local government'?

I do not feel the commission has arrived at a boundary here that is 'easily identifiable', something it specifically states it aims to achieve. The map reveals how Richards Castle has been awkwardly carved out from Kingsland ward. The Commission Review also states that it will strive to 'fix boundaries so as not to break any local ties'. Again, how is RC being served by moving to a ward where it has no local ties, a fact that cannot be altered because of the nature of present infrastructure and the geography of the landscape? And how is our ward being served by removing a vibrant parish voice from what feels at present a cohesive ward, with shared services, issues and ease of movement?

2. 'Kingsland' Ward:

Yarpole Group Parish Council understands that Bircher Ward is named after Bircher Common, which is 500 acres of land in the centre of the ward, used by all members of the ward for walking and leisure. By renaming the ward 'Kingsland' you elevate one village in the ward above all others, which seems unnecessary. Can you explain why you are doing this? We would request that you leave the ward name alone and not alter things which matter to the local community but bears no relevance to your stated aims of providing for effective local govt or equalising elector numbers. Bircher reflects community identity, Kingsland does not.

3. Inclusion of Luston, Moreton & Eye:

The existing Bircher Ward has traditionally had very little to do with the parishes of Luston, Moreton & Eye, although I am sure Councillor Bowen would work hard in representing their needs (very different as they are from ours). We feel it is much more important that Richards Castle is kept within our ward boundary, and that you should look again at removing any or all of these three (Luston, Moreton, Eye) if it is a case of keeping your electoral figures within the 10%. We think it would be very negligent of the Boundary Commission to put their electoral figures above community identity and effective and convenient local government.

4. Invitation:

We invite a representative from the Boundary Commission to visit our ward and take a look for themselves at these very real issues. I would be happy to drive you around the ward and neighbouring area to show you how affected we would be by your proposed changes. Your changes will cause us large problems and have no relevance to our community and will compromise effective community running. Please come and see for yourself.

Yours faithfully,

Jo King