

South Gloucestershire Labour Group

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The Secretary
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
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22 June 2006

Dear Sir

FUTURE ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE

1. The Boundary Committee for England (BCFE) published their Final Recommendations on future local government electoral arrangements in South Gloucestershire on 16 May. The Labour Group of councillors are generally happy with the report. However, we ask the Electoral Commission to make two changes before you issue the Order to implement the recommendations as they currently stand.

2. The areas that we urge you to reconsider are:

- **Rodway ward's southern boundary** – amendments inserted between Draft and Final Recommendation stages to transfer electors to Kings Chase ward (paragraphs 178-183 refer)
- **The Cock Road Ridge area of Woodstock ward** – recommendation to transfer to Parkwall ward (paragraphs 236-239)

Rodway ward's southern boundary

3. In their Draft Recommendations, the BCFE proposed taking the Springfield Parish ward (of Mangotsfield Rural Parish Council) out of Siston ward and adding it to Rodway ward, at its northern end, in order to produce electoral equality. This was universally accepted by the Council and political parties. This was the only change proposed for Rodway ward in the Draft report, which indicates to us that the BCFE were content with their proposals for Rodway (as paragraph 223 of the Draft report indicates).

4. Unfortunately, in their Final Recommendations report, the BCFE have proposed new boundaries at the southern end of Rodway ward, which will impact also on Kings Chase ward. These changes have been based on flawed "evidence" (paragraph 182 of the Final report) from the Conservative Group. This "evidence" is wholly inaccurate in parts, so the judgements based on it are unsound, which is why we are pursuing the matter with you.

5. There is a reference in the "evidence" to Falconride School (marked 1 on map) being the nearest school that children in this area earmarked for transfer attend. The inference here is that local families look towards Kings Chase ward for their schooling. In fact Falconride School is closing in 2007 and it is expected that its pupils will transfer to a new school to be built on the site of Deer's Wood School, firmly within Rodway ward (marked 4 on map). This is the formal assumption in the LEA's planning, as well as local expectation.

6. There is a reference in the "evidence" to Lee's Court (marked 2 on map) being elderly persons' accommodation, with the suggestion that being located at the bottom of a steep hill cuts it off from the rest of Rodway ward and breaks community links. This is not so: Lee's Court is occupied by families and single occupiers of mixed ages, and being placed at the bottom of a hill does not present a great problem in terms of community links.

7. There is continued reference in the "evidence" to local shops. We cannot accept that the claimed "comprehensive range of shops in Station Road" is applicable, since this parade of shops now comprises mainly of fast food outlets. A readily accessible local outlet for Rodway residents is the Pound Road shop, which is a very large outlet by local standards. Furthermore, the current trend in our busy lives is for major shopping trips to the nearest superstore anyway.

8. We also challenge the assertion that the Royal Archer public house is a focal point for the community. Urban public houses are simply not considered as community focal points in the same way as rural village pubs.

9. The newly proposed boundary would have a negative impact on efficient representation in the south of Rodway ward. Strong working relations exist between Rodway representatives and residents living on the Kingsmeadow Estate (marked variously 6 on the map). Over the years there have been considerable resources put into this estate as a result of discussions between council officers, elected members, and police in an effort to unify a community which had experienced problems such as drug abuse and anti-social behaviour. Rodway councillors have been the key movers in finally establishing the promise of a community flat which is currently on offer in Rodway ward, and a property in Barrington Close has been identified. This proposed community flat will act as a unifying focal point for the existing Rodway residents, including those in Barrington Close and Sherbourne Close which the BCFE are now proposing to transfer into another ward.

10. The proposals to change the southern boundary of Rodway ward will also impact on Kings Chase ward. Whilst they would very marginally improve electoral variance in Kings Chase ward, it is clear from the Draft Recommendations report that the *status quo* was acceptable in this area.

11. We do not accept that the newly proposed changes to the boundary between Rodway and Kings Chase wards will be in the best interests of the local community in either ward. We therefore urge you to retain the *status quo* in this area, as the BCFE envisaged in its Draft Recommendations.

Cock Road Ridge area of Woodstock ward

12. We cannot support the BCFE's proposal to return that part of Woodstock ward that lies within Oldland Parish to Parkwall Ward. Electoral variance would be worsened in both Woodstock and Parkwall wards as a result of this proposal. It also seems at odds with recommendations for other parts of the District.

13. This reverses the decision of the previous Review: are the properties and electors in the current Cock Road Ridge Parish ward to be moved between wards at every review? A transfer back to a ward almost exclusively located south of the Ring Road will do nothing to enhance the respect for the electoral process amongst these residents.

14. The area which the BCFE proposes to transfer to Parkwall Ward is separated from the rest of the ward by the Ring Road (dual carriageway). We note that the BCFE is proposing that the Ring Road should become the new boundary between Kings Chase and Siston wards immediately to the north of this area. The Ring Road is also the proposed boundary between Hanham and Longwell Green wards immediately to the south of this area. It is inconsistent that the BCFE accepts that the Ring Road is a significant barrier between communities (and therefore makes sensible ward boundaries) both to the north and south of the Woodstock/Parkwall area, but is proposing to abandon the Ring Road as the boundary between these two wards.

15. Cock Road Ridge Parish Ward is clearly part of the Kingswood community within the current Woodstock ward. It is served locally by the shops and the public house in Westons Way and by the Kingswood Shopping Centre to which it is connected by a number of bus services. Similarly the area is also served by primary schools in Courtney Road and Hanham Road. The properties all have Kingswood postal addresses unlike the properties to the south of the Ring Road.

16. Currently, both sides of Cock Road and Baden Road are within Woodstock ward. The BCFE's proposals split them between two wards. Yet many issues, in particular traffic, inevitably affect both sides of the road and need to be dealt with by the same councillors. To do otherwise is to create a less efficient system of local government. Of course, we recognise that in many areas, ward boundaries are drawn down the centre of roads – we would strongly urge that the boundary in this case continues to be the centre of the Ring Road.

17. We recognise that the current situation does create a small parish ward. However, that it is the result of the historic boundary of Oldland Parish (dating from the 1890s) and the construction of the Ring Road in the 1980s, which left this small part of Oldland Parish separated from the remainder of the Parish. There is a strong argument, therefore, that this area should have its own parish ward because of this separation and because it is really a separate community as outlined above. The adjacent area in Woodstock ward is unparished (and decided to remain so in a recent large-scale consultation) so no adjustment of the Parish boundary in that direction is possible.

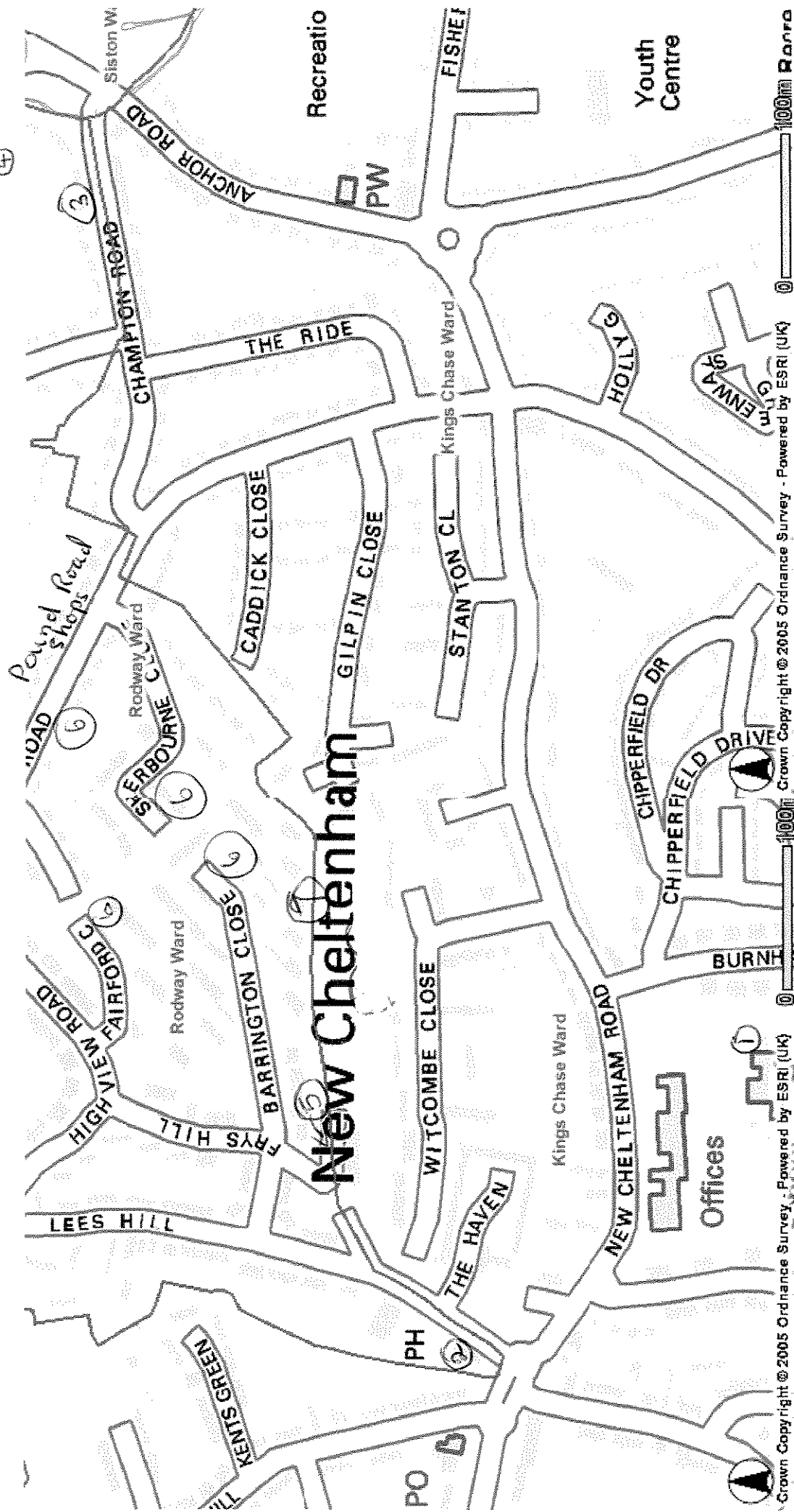
18. We believe that to change the ward boundary between Parkwall and Woodstock ward to solve the issue of the small parish ward is a case of the "tail wagging the dog". There are so many disadvantages resulting from changing the ward boundaries, as outlined above, that we urge the Electoral Commission to leave the boundary between Parkwall and Woodstock wards where it is.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Roger M. Hutchinson
Labour Group Leader

Devil's Mill School



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