

Cllr Mrs Jane Allinson



Cllr Marc Scawen



Cllr Mike Thomas



22, June, 2006

The Secretary,
The Electoral Commission,
Trevelyan House,
Great Peter Street,
London SW1P 2HW

Dear Sir,

*Received 26.06.06
AK x 3 26.06.06*

Future electoral arrangements for South Gloucestershire – Final recommendations – dated May, 2006-06

WE write as the current elected members for the wards of Oldland Common & Bitton in which respect we note the proposed change of draft recommendations, para 28 to create a three-member Bitton & Oldland Common ward, to para 209, proposing a single-member Bitton and two-member Oldland Common ward.

We further note that The Boundary Committee sees the issues to be finely balanced but consider community identity to be the crucial factor as against electoral equality.

We would be very grateful if you would consider our collective experiences since 1999, which indicate considerable confusion as to community identity, a situation that we do not wish to see perpetuated. We strongly feel that this review provides an opportunity to improve a most unusual but complex historical situation as follows:-

The nub of the problem is that the village of Oldland Common, which provides the majority of the main services in the two wards i.e. secondary school; doctors, chemist, dentist, vet, 2 chapels, post office, 2 takeaways, 3 pubs, a club, 2 church halls and the group activities that relate, **is located in Bitton Parish not Oldland Parish which covers adjacent villages nearby.** The confusion is such that Oldland Parish Councillors have tried on numerous occasions in recent years to change their name but could not agree upon a solution.

The natural response to the question ‘where do you live?’ ‘I live in Oldland’

The situation is compounded by the electoral ward of Oldland Common which **does not include 440 Oldland Common residents who reside to the south of the main services. They, much to their astonishment are part of Bitton Ward. So they elect a Bitton councillor who has no influence on the main services of Oldland Common.**

So we have the main village of the two wards split as a result of the last boundary review in order to achieve electoral equality.

At the outset of this review we did not realise the opportunity for ward boundary changes but, once this emerged from the draft recommendation i.e. a three-member Bitton & Oldland Common ward, we realised the potential to not only have electoral equality but also to overcome the community identity problems in that everyone could identify with Bitton & Oldland Common.

On this basis we are in support of the original draft recommendation, although it will be seen from the report mapping that Orchard Ward of Oldland Parish is clearly part of Longwell Green and Cadbury Heath rather than Oldland Common. **Trying to take a helpful stance, which we are convinced would benefit community identity, we were prepared to accept this extra territory, recognising the potential large disparity in electors if this was not the case.**

However, we are now faced with the worst of both worlds in that electors for Orchard ward will elect Oldland Common councillors whilst almost as many electors of Oldland Common Village will still vote for a Bitton member. **We see this as bizarre.**

We will now try to make what we hope will be seen as helpful comments relating to KINGSWOOD SOUTH area – pages 60 – 66.

186. As our experience indicates considerable confusion as to community identity, we see 5% fewer electors for Bitton to be in contravention of aims and objectives recorded at paras 40 & 41.

187. We reluctantly accept the addition of Orchard Ward in order to achieve electoral equality. However, we cannot understand the argument that Bitton has good electoral equality, neither do we follow the argument '**A431 Bath Road being the main transport route through the urban and rural parts of the area**' That is the east/west route but there is another main route, A4175, north/south, that links Oldland Common Village(part of which is in the Bitton Ward) with Pines Estate, Bitton; Cherry Gardens; Willsbridge & Keynsham

188. We would emphasise that Bitton Ward is far more urban than at first sight. Of an electorate of 2,736, there are 1,862 residents bounded by A4175 and A431 comprising a continuous built up area that starts in North Common, through Oldland Common and into the Bitton Ward. Another 494 electors live in Bitton Village which has always been categorised by South Gloucestershire Council as urban with a factory, Intier, that has employed up to 700 people in recent years. A residual number of only 380 persons live in rural parts and some of these live off the extremities of A4175 towards Keynsham and A431 at Swineford. The only real rural communities are Upton Cheyney and Beach with a total of less than 200 people.

191. There is an example of confusion relating to community identity with the quote '**Cock Road Ridge parish ward of Oldland Common(should read Oldland)**

194. We challenge the contention that the two wards have a different geographical nature as the ward boundaries show arbitrary borders as evidenced by the mapping document 6. Also much of Bitton Ward is urban, see 188 above, with wide rural areas that have little housing. Bitton Ward includes part of Oldland Common not the whole.

195. Here again community identity comes to the fore. We cannot understand how welding two parts of Oldland Common Village together can be welding two fundamentally disparate communities. We would also refer to 187, above, re A4175, north/south link.

196. We again refer to 187, above, which shows that in no way can either Cherry Gardens or Willsbridge be described as diverse villages as they are part of the urban area bounded by A4175 & A431.

As for Oldland Common, the community facilities such as Bitton Recreation Club are shared by residents from surrounding villages and urban areas. The church schools are in Oldland Common ward and the Council designated secondary school for the area, Sir Bernard Lovell, is located in Oldland Common Village.

197. We feel that comparisons are often not like with like, and there is no need for a 5% variance for Bitton Ward as this can easily be overcome by a three member ward which predominantly would cover the territory of Bitton Parish which already operates on the basis of linking all communities..

199. As ward members we all have links with Bitton Parish Council and promote our services to the parish electorate as a whole, each one of us taking responsibility for specialised services. We have adopted this arrangement, recognising that the electorate is often confused as to their name of ward.

This strategy cannot be guaranteed should different members be elected in the future so we feel a three-member ward would secure this informal arrangement

201. Further examples of confusion, lines 2 and 3 should refer to **Oldland Common Village**, lines 9,10 & 11 should refer to **Oldland Parish**.

202. Line 4 should read **Oldland Common Village**. Line 9 should read **Oldland Common Village**

205. There is much movement of peoples for schools and churches, there is no evident loyalty within a particular village.

Traditionally, Bitton Ward always had larger industrial facilities than Oldland Common Ward so again the rural issue is in question except for the fields.

206. May we draw your attention to the following **'The balance of evidence is very close, indeed, much of it is contradictory.'**


'.....we would also concur that the Willsbridge and Cherry Gardens areas have links into the Oldland Common area to the north. These links include local schools, shops, churches and other community facilities.'

208. As the only reason for worsened levels of electoral equality are measured against the community identity argument, we feel that there is no justification for failing to achieve the best possible electoral equality as the community arguments are marginal at best, as outlined in numerous paragraphs above.

209. Again we feel the community identity arguments as presented in The Boundary Committee's report are insufficient to justify worsening electoral equality.

We hope that we have been successful in questioning The Final Recommendations of The Boundary Committee and ask you to kindly give consideration to our representations that for the benefit of our local communities, both in identity and the service they may receive from their councillors and Councils, that you will be able to agree a **Three-Member Bitton & Oldland Common Ward**.

Yours faithfully,

Cllr Mrs Jane Allinson..... 

Cllr Marc Scawen..... 

Cllr Mike thomas 