

Eleanor Gregory

From: Tim Bowden
Sent: 11 January 2010 17:30
To: Richard Buck
Subject: FW: Electoral Review - Bedford Borough Council - representation for review

From: Graham Follett [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 January 2010 16:32
To: Reviews@
Cc: peter sharpe; keith.simmons@bedford.gov.uk; Alistair BURT
Subject: Electoral Review - Bedford Borough Council - representation for review

Stevington Parish Council

Chairman – Councillor Mrs Doreen Pendlington

From
Mrs Doreen Pendlington

[REDACTED]

Clerk

Mr Graham Follett

[REDACTED]

Review Officer (Bedford),
The Boundary Committee for England,
Trevelyan House,
Great Peter Street,
LONDON,
SW1P 2HW.

11 January 2010

Dear Sir,

Review of Electoral Boundaries in the Borough of Bedford – Stevington Parish

I write to express Stevington Parish Council's very strong objection to the warding arrangements proposed by Bedford Borough Council and being submitted to you today, especially in relation to the proposal to put the two small rural villages of Pavenham and Stevington with the very much larger urbanised village of Oakley.

My Parish Council urges you to reject Bedford Borough Council's proposals. Our favoured suggestion would be to create a revised ward incorporating Stevington, Pavenham, Felmersham and Radwell, and Carlton and Chellington. These parishes are all similar sized communities with similar rural interests, priorities, concerns and needs. We have happily been part of the same ward for many years and we would question the need to change something that works.

You have acknowledged receipt of our letter of 21 December objecting to the proposals and we are aware that Pavenham Parish Council communicated with them in a similar vein. Those objections fell on deaf ears and no alterations were made to the proposal to join Pavenham and Stevington with Oakley, which incidentally seems to have been determined by the borough **before the end** of their consultation period on 4 December.

We understand that the chairman of Pavenham Parish Council spoke on behalf of both parishes at the meeting of Bedford Borough Council on 7 January and voiced the concerns of both parishes. We further understand his comments aroused concerns and differences of opinion in the committee. His comments regarding the meeting were that there was obviously disquiet about many of the proposed re-alignments of the ward boundaries both within the urban area and the rural parishes. There were only six committee members present – some of whom had been on the Task Group which had made the proposals. One of the Task Group spoke very belligerently against making any amendments giving the excuse that there was not time to consider any more changes and the only alternative was not to make any proposal to the Boundary Committee for England. Concern was expressed by one member of the Committee that such an important issue should not be left to that committee to decide what proposals should be submitted to you but that the whole council should consider the matter. At the end of the day the committee voted by 4 votes to 2 to adopt the proposals. Only four borough councillors therefore supported the very major changes to ward boundaries affecting thousands of electors, and which the Borough Council has submitted to you. The other two committee members expressed strong objections/reservations about the proposals.

Our Parish Council chairman has long felt that the major reason for the disquiet is that the over-riding criterion during this review has been that all wards should have the same number of electors. With Bedford Borough being split approximately 60/40 between the urban areas of Bedford plus Kempston and the outlying villages there are very large differences between the needs of the urban area and the villages. In its proposal the Borough Council refers to 15 rural wards. However there are very major differences between those 15 "rural wards". Elstow, Wootton, Bromham, Biddenham, Clapham, Oakley, and Eastcotts are all very large urbanised villages on the outskirts of Bedford/Kempston, and are in effect, suburbs of Bedford, completely different in character to the smaller rural villages further away from Bedford. If those large urbanised villages/suburbs are taken from the truly "rural wards" that leaves only 8 wards representing truly rural villages – i.e. only one-fifth of the proposed total number of councillors.

We have already expressed our concern that the rural parishes would not be properly represented if you persisted with the criterion of equalising the number of electors per ward and we urged you to keep the ward boundaries in the rural areas the same as they currently are. The over-riding criterion of equalising the number of electors per ward has resulted in the compromise/botch-up in the Borough Council's proposed revision of the rural ward boundaries. In order to equalise numbers the Borough Council clearly had a problem with Oakley which in itself is large but not large enough to justify being a ward on its own under the proposed criterion. The Borough Council has tried to overcome the problem by tacking on the two small villages of Pavenham and Stevington to Oakley thereby creating a ward with one village approximately four times the size of the other two and double the size

of the other two put together.

If implemented that proposal would require one councillor to represent two small villages which are completely different to the larger village and often have opposing opinions and requirements. What is most likely to happen in practice is that the elected councillor would be resident of the largest village – Oakley – and concentrate their efforts on that village with Pavenham and Stevington being the poor relations. Indeed the very idea of naming the proposed ward “Oakley” gives the impression of that being the dominant village. Why not call it the “Pavenham” ward or the “Stevington” ward. We understand that in the past the wards have been named after the largest village but note that in the proposal to be sent to you by the Borough Council it has given four of its so called “rural wards” dual names. Why not the rest? Past experience has shown that where a large village was grouped with a small village less than a fifth its size the councillor, who lived in the large village, concentrated almost all their efforts on that village and only attended the smaller village’s parish council meetings just before an election was due to try to strum up some support.

Our preferred proposal for the new warding arrangement as it affects Stevington, is set out at the head of this letter. There are alternative schemes for the remainder of the wards which could be considered:

- 1 Why not put all the four large urbanised villages of Clapham, Oakley, Bromham and Biddenham together and allow them to have four councillors between them. The total number of electors would be 11,014 which averages out at 2753 per councillor – not much different from the overall average and more than is proposed for the Riseley ward. If more were needed to raise the total number then Great Denham – which is really part of Biddenham – could be added to the four villages.
- 2 Another alternative is to put Oakley with Clapham and allow them to have two councillors between them. They are similar villages and are virtually joined up already – there being no open countryside between them along Station Road. The combination would give a ward of 5294 electors which averages at 2647 per councillor – again not much different to that proposed for the Riseley ward.

We urge you not to accept the proposal of Bedford Borough Council, in its present form, and we look forward to receiving your comments in this respect.

A hard copy of this email is being posted to you today, as we are aware that today is the last day for submissions to you. A copy is also being sent to the under mentioned organisations and people

Please acknowledge receipt of this email which is being sent at 16.31 p.m. on 11 January 2010.

Yours faithfully

Graham Follett
 Parish Clerk, on behalf of Stevington Parish Council
 Parish Councillors: Mrs D Pendlington (Chairman), Mr T Stanbridge, Mrs S Bush, Mrs H Prentice, Mrs A Campion, Mr B Westbrook, Mr R Puckett.

CC to K Simmons, Head of Registration and Records, Bedford Borough Council
Mr Alistair Burt MP
Mr Jim Brandon (Borough Councillor)
Dr P Sharpe – Clerk to Pavenham Parish Council

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