



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Bedford Borough Council, Conservative Group Room,
Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford, MK42 9AP
Telephone 01237 228 139

12th July 2010

Dear Mr Buck,

Regarding the warding of Bedford Borough Council we are concerned about the proposals which the Borough Council Warding Committee and the General Purposes Committee may put forward. It appears to us that the suggestions which are being made may not be based on what is best for communities and democracy, but may instead be more concerned with political gerrymandering. We would therefore like to urge you to keep the boundaries as in your draft recommendations.

We recognise that we ourselves are part of a political group and therefore may also be seen to be biased, however, the suggestion to keep the wards as your draft recommendations are in fact of no particular political advantage to our political group. We draw your attention to two examples.

Firstly the Warding Committee will be putting to General Purposes Committee a suggestion that Castle Ward be extended to George Street and end at the River, rather than extending south as per your draft recommendations. The area south of the River would, under these suggestions, become part of Newnham Ward, creating the 'Newnham Finger'. Looking at the communities involved and the urban nature of the ward it would seem entirely illogical to try to keep Castle Ward the same as now, as far as possible, regardless of the knock-on effects this would have on other wards. The 'Newnham Finger' would make Newnham Ward 2 miles long, which is very large for an urban ward, and force communities together which have nothing in common. If the 'Newnham finger' suggestion were to go ahead then Councillor Mingay would be able to say that he lived in Newnham Ward, which he currently represents and will hope to represent again post 2011, but looking at the bigger picture for Bedford it does not make sense.

Secondly some of the evidence which has been put forward to support the Council's proposed changes to the draft recommendations is fairly flimsy. For example taking Great Barford Ward and the issue of The Spires, only around 4% of the inhabitants of The Spires have replied to say whether they would like to be in Renhold Ward yet the Warding Committee voted in favour of putting The Spires into Renhold Parish and splitting Great Barford Ward into two. It seems to us that it is very strange that the Committee pushed for this on the basis of such statistically minimal numbers. Ravensden Parish Council indicates it would prefer a two member Great Barford Ward without the Woodlands Area in the ward.

The make up of the Warding Committee and the General Purposes Committee reflect the political proportions on the Council. We recognise this is obligatory for General Purposes and is quite proper in terms of reflecting the popular vote and representation of the people, it does raise some questions about the legitimacy of any decisions on Warding. All Member of Bedford Borough Council, with the exception of one, are part of a political group. There is therefore a conflict of interest in that we as Councillors have a dual role to both represent our residents but we also have allegiances to our political groups and the furthering of their aims.

We therefore urge you approach any suggestions from the Council to change boundaries from your draft recommendations with caution and retain your draft recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Carole Ellis,
Leader of the Conservative Group

Councillor John Mingay
Newnham Ward

