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Sent: 05 July 2010 15:21
To: Lawrence, Arion
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Local Government Boundary Review for Central Bedfordshire
Attachments: BOUNREV.doc

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE LABOUR PARTY

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5 July

2010

The Review Officer
Central Bedfordshire Review
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
76-78 Turnmill Street
London EC1M 5LG

Dear Sirs,

Attached please find comments on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Labour Party on the Draft Recommendations for the Electoral Review of Central Bedfordshire.

Could you please advise me speedily if comments in the form of an e-mail attachment are acceptable to you, or whether you will also require a paper copy sent by ordinary mail.

Yours truly

Raymond Harris
Secretary, Centbeds Labour Party

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06 JUL 2010

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE LABOUR PARTY-----

Comments on the Draft Recommendations by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for the Electoral Review of Central Bedfordshire

Preamble

In the briefing booklet "Electoral Reviews: what they are and how you can get involved" there is a clear implication on p16 that in an ideal world the Commission would favour single member wards, a view which your representative endorsed at the briefing meeting held at Central Beds Council HQ at Chicksands. In the booklet it is also noted that other considerations, notably of community issues, may take precedence in deciding between single and multi-member wards.

We wholly concur with the view that single member wards are preferable. The electorate are often confused by multi-member wards and fail to identify who is their representative. We concede that in rural areas, it is often necessary to have multi-member wards to achieve electoral parity (electors/councillor) and this view was reflected in our proposals. We are, however, very unhappy that you appear to have abandoned your principles quite unnecessarily, in the urban areas of Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Flitwick and Biggleswade, where it is relatively easy to devise single member wards which satisfy your criteria as well or better than your existing proposals.

We now discuss these urban areas individually.

1) Leighton Buzzard (inc. Linslade)

We endorse your decision to recognize the Grand Union Canal as a natural boundary. In the Linslade-Southcott area west of the canal the West Coast Mainline is a second natural boundary. The Commission should note that there are only two road crossings of this railway line within the urban area of Leighton Buzzard (Soulbury Rd. & Wing Rd.). Our proposals recognized this railway boundary by including a single-member ward between the canal and the railway. This leaves the remainder as a two-member ward, light at present on numbers (but less of an anomaly than elsewhere in your proposals!). Moreover there are already plans under consultation for further development in this area west of the railway, and it seems inevitable that within the ten year life of this revision, further developments will take place out towards the new natural boundary of the western by-pass which will rectify the anomaly. We therefore commend to the Commission our proposal for a single member ward covering the area between the railway and the canal and for (pro tem) a two-member ward for the remainder, which will then need to be split when the developments have taken place.

In the remainder of Leighton Buzzard you have chosen to rubber-stamp the proposals of Central Beds Council by adopting two three-member wards. In terms of the criteria of communal interests etc. outlined in the briefing booklet, the CBC proposals are grotesque. They force together into one ward the most affluent area of the town with some of the most deprived areas. These have no community or communal interest whatsoever, and yet you rejected the Labour Party proposals for failing to provide any evidence of communality etc. In submitting our proposals we assumed that the Commission would have before it not only the existing arrangements but also those which were in force prior to the last revision.

East of the canal Leighton Buzzard is divided naturally into communities by the radial major roads leading out from the centre – Plantation Rd., Vandyke Rd., High Street-Hockliffe Rd., Stanbridge Rd. and Billington Rd. The old District ward boundaries (prior to 2007) which had existed unchanged for many years and thus presumably satisfied your booklet criteria, were based on these natural radial divisions. Our proposals which you rejected for lack of evidence are, in broad terms, a reversion to these boundaries. There are firstly some minor adjustments at the edges to balance numbers, and secondly to take account of the new developments south of Stanbridge Rd., which did not exist pre- 2007.

One other relevant consideration is that while we accept that political balance is not within your remit, you should be aware that an undivided ward system like the present CBC proposal, will result in all the councillors in Leighton Buzzard coming from one political party in perpetuity, thus effectively preventing about 40% of the electorate from ever having a councillor of their choice. Such a situation can only bring local government into disrepute and will certainly result in even lower electoral turnout than we have at present.

We thus urge you to consider the sub-division of Leighton Buzzard into single member wards.

Clearly something is also amiss with the proposals for Town(parish) ward divisions in Leighton-Linslade, since these are based on twenty councillors, whilst the present number is twenty-one. This needs to be revisited once you have decided whether to properly subdivide Leighton Buzzard, so that CBC and Town wards can be coterminous.

2)Dunstable

Again with the exception of Northfields Ward, the Commission have chosen to endorse the CBC proposals.

For Northfields Ward, given the numbers problem, it is necessary to include in any new arrangements, the areas east of High Street North presently in polling districts DC1 and DC2. This grafts on to the old Northfields Ward an area with no common interests, separated by the busy Watling Street, which given the level of traffic and the paucity of crossing points might as well be a river or a canal!

The cohesive community in the old Northfields Ward is not the whole ward but the original Beecroft Estate – comprised of the present polling divisions N1,N3 and N4. The remaining parts of the old ward have little communality with this area, and indeed , a considerable portion used to be part of Houghton Regis. The geography means that to make a new single member ward the trans-High St. DC1 & DC2 areas have to be welded(!) to the original Beecroft Estate, but this happens regardless of whether the new proposal is for one two-member or two single-member wards.

We can see no merit in arguing communality with areas which used to be in Houghton Regis and we would therefore ask the Commission to re-instate the Labour Party proposals for two single-member wards, which are very similar to those of CBC.

The Commission has endorsed the CBC proposal for a two-member Icknield Ward. The original Icknield(or Hadrian) Estate is the area bounded by Luton Rd., Poynters Rd., Wilbury Drive and Ridgeway Avenue. Of the remainder, the existing polling district ICK4 is the area south of the Luton Rd., and again given the traffic density and only two crossing points in nearly two miles, might as well be the other side of a river. Otherwise the rest of the existing ward consists of the new developments on the north side of Luton Rd., between the railway line and Ridgeway Avenue. Obtaining balanced numbers requires that the area of the present DC1 as recommended by CBC be added to the ward.

On grounds of commonality etc. it seems appropriate to preserve the original Hadrian Estate as one single-member division, with the remainder as a second single-member ward. The Commission should note that apart from the new addition of the DC1 area, this split restores the pre-2007 division into polling districts of the old Icknield Ward. The then BC, BD and BE divisions were the Hadrian Estate and BA and BB the remainder.

We would therefore ask that this historical precedent be restored and that the Commission accept the split into two single-member wards as proposed by the Labour Party.

The Commission has endorsed the CBC proposal for a two-member Watling Ward. The existing Watling Ward consists of five polling divisions Three of these, W1, W4 & W5 are accessible to the rest of the ward only via Lowther Rd. Part of the W2 polling division is an enclave accessible only via a one-way street(Periwinkle Lane) and most of this enclave is as near on foot to the polling station used by W1 and W5, as it is to the existing polling station for W2. Again to make up the numbers, it is necessary to add to the existing Watling Ward most of the former Chiltern Ward which abuts polling division W3.

The W1, W4 and W5 areas constitute one community with shops in Lowther Rd., whereas the remainder have their own shopping area in Langdale Rd. These two areas were originally built as separate estates by different builders(William Old & Laing).

We would therefore ask the Commission to accept that it is logical to make a split into two single-member wards. This was contained in the Labour Party proposals for new Watling and Chiltern Wards.

Given the present recommendations by the Commission for dividing Dunstable into three two-member wards and two single-member wards for CBC elections, it is quite clear that there must be an error in the accompanying recommendations for Town(parish) elections. The new two-member Icknield, Northfields and Watling Wards all have roughly the same number of electors, but have been allocated 7, 4 and 4 Town Council seats respectively, whilst the new single-member Central and Manshead Wards have been allocated 3 seats each. These proposals are a gross violation of electoral parity. Given that for CBC the Commission have succeeded in obtaining good electoral parity, the best solution for the Town Council would be to increase the number of councillors to 24 and then to adopt a 6,6,6,3,3 split. Failing that we would support the proposal which we understand the Town Council have made, for the present total of 21 councillors with a 5,5,5,3,3 split. If, of course the

Commission accepts our submission to divide the proposed three two-member CBC wards into six single-member wards, making a total of eight single-member wards, then the simple solution for the parish is eight coterminous three-member wards.

3)Houghton Regis

The Commission have chosen to endorse the CBC proposals for Houghton Regis. The Commission should note that Houghton Regis is comprised of the original village almost all contained in the present Houghton Hall Ward, together with two purpose built self-contained estates, originally intended to house London overspill, which are now the Tithe Farm and Parkside Wards.(The latter with later additions).

On this basis we believe that there is a serious flaw in the CBC proposals . To make up the numbers in the new Houghton Hall ward, the western portion of the Tithe Farm estate between Tithe Farm Rd. and Bedford Rd. has been cut-off from Tithe Farm Ward and added to Houghton Hall. This area is an integral part of the Tithe Farm estate, and to cut it off violates all the principles of communality etc. The area has no road connection with any other part of Houghton Regis, except via the rest of the Tithe Farm estate. We therefore submit that this area should remain in Tithe Farm Ward.

There is a knock-on effect on the numbers in Houghton Hall, but the anomaly will be less than the Commission is tolerating elsewhere. Moreover, more building development is likely in the Houghton Hall area within the life of the review. Additionally the numbers can be partially rebalanced by removing from Tithe Farm Ward a small area of the old village, comprised of the High St., Park Av. And The Green, which on community grounds should always have been in Houghton Hall Ward. If necessary the numbers can further be balanced by removing three small areas from Parkside into Houghton Hall, namely Johnson Court, Manning Court and Bloomsbury Gardens, which are enclaves on the edge of the ward with no road connection to the rest of Parkside Ward. These changes are detailed in the Labour Party proposals.

At some stage it will become desirable to split the two-member Houghton Hall Ward into separate one-member wards. The natural division is along the line Houghton Road-High Street. We chose to address this problem now and we commend this course of action to the Commission.

4)Toddington & Barton

Barton is identified as an area for further development within the lifetime of this review. We therefore submit that it makes no sense to start with a Barton Ward which is already 13% in excess of the norm and is the largest deviation in the whole CBC area. This is why the Labour Party proposals linked Barton with the Chalton, Streatley and Sundon Wards, (a long standing arrangement from the days of the Beds C.C. elections) in a two-member ward, and had Toddington, which has less scope for growth, as a single-member ward. We recognize that this separates Toddington from Harlington which has possible knock-on effects elsewhere, but these were also addressed in the Labour Party proposals. We ask the Commission to reconsider the arrangements for this area to avoid creating a Barton seat which is already an anomaly, and is liable to become grossly anomalous within the life of this review. We

note that any future proposals to correct the anomaly would, of necessity, require something akin to the proposals tabled by the Labour Party.

4)Flitwick

We object to there being no apparent attempt to partition Flitwick into single member wards. The Labour Party proposed a viable scheme;there may, of course, be others, but a blanket three-member seat offends all the principles of accountability, identification with councillors etc. As in Leighton Buzzard, it also raises the virtual certainty of the effective disenfranchisement of about 40% of the electorate, with the knock-on effects on the entire credibility of local government and electoral turnout.

5)Biggleswade

The remarks just made about Flitwick apply equally to Biggleswade. It is relatively simple to construct four cohesive single-member wards. In the interests of accountability etc. this should be done.

The present proposals for Biggleswade parish elections clearly violate drastically the requirement to balance the number of electors/councillor and need to be re-addressed. We are aware that our colleagues in Biggleswade Labour Party have presented a detailed analysis of the deficiencies of the present proposals, so we will not repeat them here, but state that we fully support the submission that they have made. We feel obliged to remark that had single-member ward proposals for Biggleswade CBC seats, like those tabled by the Labour Party, been implemented, then it would have been easy to have coterminous parish seats with balanced numbers.

Raymond Harris, Secretary, Central Bedfordshire Labour Party 5 July 2010