

AYLESBURY LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Reform House 6 Castle Street, Aylesbury, HP20 2RE

Review Officer

Buckinghamshire Review

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Layden House

76-86 Turnmill Street

London

EC1, 5LG

Dear Sir,

Boundary Review for the County of Buckinghamshire

1. This response addresses the changes as they affect the area covered by the Aylesbury Vale District Council. It is a joint response by the Aylesbury and Buckingham Constituency Liberal Democrats.

Councillor Numbers

2. Whilst we understand the stated reasons for reducing the number of County Councillors in Buckinghamshire, we do not accept their validity and note that they were originally pushed through the County Council unilaterally by the majority group. This reduction has had the unfortunate side effect of creating Divisions with electorates that are (unlike currently) not related to the number of electors in District Wards. This is also true beyond Aylesbury Vale. Typically, current single member divisions are fairly closely equivalent to 3 single member District Wards. The new divisions are more like 3½ Wards and this significantly increases the need to split Wards between Divisions. This makes it far harder to keep similar communities aligned in the rural areas and creates a patchwork pattern of Town Council Wards in Aylesbury where the number of electors per Councillor as currently proposed varies from 940 to 3063.

Aylesbury as a distinct area

3. We are also concerned by the Commission's introduction of the concept of Aylesbury Town and non-Town Divisions. Whilst it is clearly preferable that Divisions are not generally part urban/part rural the idea that Aylesbury Vale's share of the seats should be, or even can be, divided in proportion between the Town and rest of the District seems to us to be illogical and, indeed, beyond the remit of the

Commission [Paragraphs 45 and 48 of the draft recommendations, in particular, refer].

4. This is emphasised by the fact that the Commission's definition of the Town is itself, in our view, arbitrary and illogical. If we are to go down this route, then it seems to us that there are three possible definitions of the urban area - The Parish of Aylesbury, the Parish plus those parts of other parishes that are physically connected to Aylesbury or the Parish plus all the nearby urban extensions and modern developments that are clearly not historic villages or based on historic villages.
5. The Commission makes a case for considering Watermead to be separate from Aylesbury. We would accept that it is a discrete area with its own identity – albeit that is attached to Aylesbury Town at one corner. However, the proposals consider Fairford Leys (Coldharbour Parish) as part of Aylesbury. There is, in fact, a better case for arguing that it is a distinct community than for Watermead. As well as being clearly physically separate from Aylesbury, it has additional planning controls (through the Ernest Cook Trust) applying to the whole community. This clearly makes it a discrete area in a way that simply does not apply to the other new developments around Aylesbury.
6. The definition of [Greater] Aylesbury that the Commission is using excludes the separate "new" communities of Buckingham Park and Watermead but includes the equally (or more) distinct communities of Fairford Leys (Coldharbour) and Stoke Leys. It also splits the Parishes of Stoke Mandeville and Bierton in two. Whilst there may be some geographical justification for the former, it is difficult to see the logic for the latter.
7. We do not make these points because they necessarily lead to suggested changes to the Commission's proposals but because we think that it is important to register our view that the Commission has created an additional and inappropriate criterion that simply should not be used in evaluating the proposals or any amendment thereto.

The Proposals – Introduction

8. We recognise the difficulty that the Commission faces in keeping communities together and placing like areas in the same Division caused by the shape of the District and the need to attain as best as possible electoral equality. We understand that this will mean that some Divisions will be less than satisfactory even though they are the best that can be done. This is particularly true around Wendover where there would be a strong case for combining it with parts of the rural area to the east and south of the village rather than parts of Stoke Mandeville Parish if that were not forbidden because it would involve crossing District Boundaries.
9. Assuming that the Commission continues to operate on the basis of 49 members and given that this means that the new Divisions will be far

less able to avoid cutting across community boundaries than do the current Divisions, we accept that the majority of the Commission's proposals within Aylesbury Vale are the best that can be done. However, we would wish to make some specific comments to endorse or challenge particular elements of the package.

Winslow, Buckingham North and Great Brickhill

10. We welcome the inclusion of *Granborough* in the Winslow Division. Winslow provides both the retail and social facilities for Granborough and there are strong community links.
11. We strongly disagree with the response from Bucks County Council in which it is alleged that the Local Member [there are, of course, two local members involved but only one is quoted] believes Granborough has no affinity with the town of Winslow. Winslow is a couple of miles from Granborough on the only main road through the village – it is the place that local people go when they need things as there is no retail provision in the village itself and that, by definition, creates a close affinity.
12. On a similar basis, we believe that *Thornborough* should be part of the Buckingham North Division as it has close links with Buckingham, which provides for its needs, but none with Winslow. Your own rationale for including Thornborough in Winslow Division is that it has good road links with Padbury. However, whilst Padbury is currently part of the Winslow Division, it itself actually has closer links with Buckingham and is only included in the Winslow Ward because of the need to provide electoral equality. Furthermore, Padbury provides little in the way of facilities, so the existence of a good road link cannot be taken to imply any community of interest.
13. The inclusion of Thornborough in the Buckingham North Division would improve electoral equality by helping address the shortfall in the number of electors in that Division [Currently, at -7% the smallest in the District]. We note that the County Council also supports moving Thornborough into Buckingham North and agree with the comments that they have made about its affinity with both Buckingham Town and the other villages that you propose to include in the Buckingham North Division.
14. The County Council, in its response to this consultation, has suggested including Swanbourne, Mursley, Dunton and Hoggeston with the Winslow Division. We do not believe that this proposal is sound. These communities fit most logically with Stewkley and the addition of 1,100 electors would put Winslow well beyond the acceptable size for a County Division in this review. These parishes should remain in the proposed Great Brickhill Division.

15. We understand the logic of renaming the Buckingham South Division Buckingham South West. We believe that a similar logic applies to Buckingham North, which should be renamed *Buckingham North East*.

Stone and Waddesdon

16. We would strongly support the creation of the new *Stone and Waddesdon* Division. The County Council's original proposal to include the Berryfields development within Grendon Underwood Division made little sense. The new community will be very different from the villages in the rest of that Division. It will eventually contain nearly 4,000 homes and, as your report indicates [Paragraph 46], construction is well underway. It would soon grow to dominate the Grendon Underwood Division which has no other sizable community to counter balance it. Also, it would only have been connected to the rest of the division by a very narrow strip of land.
17. Stone and Waddesdon are much larger settlements which will lead to a much better balance within the Division. Additionally, Waddesdon Parish Council has been looking after planning issues in the Berryfields area because the Quarrendon Parish meeting does not currently function. That means that there is already a strong link between the new development and Waddesdon. Recognising this in the new County Boundaries seems to us to be absolutely right.

Bierton & Hulcott

18. We recognise that the reduced number of Councillors and the need for electoral equality has driven the proposal to include the *Bierton Ward* of Bierton Parish in the same Division as Aston Clinton and Weston Turville. Unfortunately, Bierton has no real connection with the rest of the proposed Division. Bierton's links both in terms of facilities and community are along the A418 with Aylesbury and Wing. There is only one road link to the rest of the proposed Division and that is over a dangerous hump back bridge on Broughton Lane to the boundary of Aylesbury and Weston Turville. There is no cultural link between the communities. People in Bierton do not generally use the facilities in other parts of the proposed Division, nor do the residents there have any reason to visit Bierton.
19. Furthermore, there have been recent and heated debates about growth around Aylesbury and a key element of those debates has been Bierton's resistance to proposals supported by Parishes in the current Aston Clinton Division for development in its vicinity. Putting together two areas that have strongly felt and diametrically opposed views on the key issue of the time seems to us to be something best avoided.
20. We believe that Bierton and Hulcott Parishes would rather be in the Wing Division and would be better off placed there (or even in

Aylesbury East) than in Aston Clinton. We understand that that would lead to a significant departure from the electoral average for the two Divisions concerned but suggest that the Commission should seriously consider this in the light of the particular geographic and social circumstances pertaining in this instance.

21. If you feel that you cannot support the consequent disparity in numbers, then we suggest that you end the situation where Berton Parish is split between two Divisions by moving the *Oldham's Meadows* Ward of Berton Parish from Aylesbury East (which is currently 4% over-subscribed) to Aston Clinton & Berton (which is currently 3% under-subscribed). We believe that there is clear merit in the whole of a Parish being in the same Division unless there are overwhelming reasons why it should not be. If Berton Ward is to remain part of Aston Clinton Division, then we would submit that no such reasons exist. Particularly since the revised divisions will be closer to the desired numerical total on average than they are in the current proposals.

Aylesbury Town Council

22. We understand that the fact that Parish Council Wards may not cross District Ward or County Division Boundaries means that the Commission really has no choice over the boundaries of Aylesbury Parish Wards. Nevertheless the Commission's proposals create some obvious anomalies. On the Commission's recommendations the electors per Parish Councillor vary between 3069 in Oakfield South and 940 in Oakfield North. Furthermore you propose 3 Councillors for Elmhurst with 4564 electors and only 2 for Southcourt which is larger with 5027 electors.
23. You state that the County Council can institute a review to deal with any anomalies, although it is, in fact the District that has these powers. However, a review involves a public consultation separate from the one that you are currently undertaking and costs both officer time and money. It seems wrong in this time of pressure on public resources effectively to force a review to deal with anomalies that the Commission can itself sort out as part of this review.
24. Indeed, AVDC did conduct a review which reported prior to the date for the commencement of your review but whose conclusions took effect from this May's election. As a result of that review, the number of councillors for Aylesbury Town was increased from 24 to 25 by adding a second member for Central Ward. Consequently, your proposals have the unintended consequence of reducing the size of the Parish Council by one and reducing the representation for Central Ward by one. We are sure that, had you actually conducted your review on the basis of the Council as it is post 2011 rather than as it was pre 2011, you would not have been recommending the reversal of a change that

has only recently come about following a review and public consultation. Accordingly, we propose that *the size of Aylesbury Town Council be 25 members (as opposed to the 24 that you state) and that its Central Ward return two members.*

25. To tackle the other anomalies as best we can within the constraints that apply, we propose that the Town Ward of *Oakfield South* shall elect 2 councillors rather than 1 and that The Town ward of *Southcourt* elect 3 rather than 2. This should be balanced by the Town Ward of *Elmhurst* electing 2 Councillors rather than 3 and The Town Ward of *Bedgrove North* 1 Councillor rather than 2.
26. These changes are straight forward and simply remove obvious anomalies. They significantly reduce the variation in electors per Councillor, which become 930 to 2282. Indeed, if you ignore the two really small wards which are unavoidable as a consequence of the Commission's proposals, the variance is 1372 to 2282 which, whilst far from perfect is a great deal better than the original position. We hope the Commission will have no difficulty in adopting these suggestions.

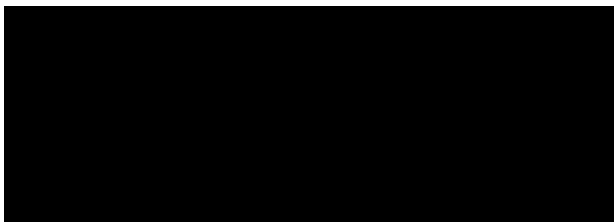
Aylesbury Town Ward Names

27. We appreciate that this is not a key issue and that, when a ward is to be split, you have adopted the naming convention of taking the existing Town Council Ward name and appending a direction to it. Generally this seems to be a convenient and quick way of handling matters. However, it creates two anomalies.
28. The District Ward of Walton Court and Hawkslade contains the current Town Ward of Walton Court and the Stoke Mandeville Ward of Hawkslade. Because Hawkslade is part of Stoke Mandeville, it is confusing and inappropriate to include it in the title of a Town Ward. For that reason the existing Town Ward is called Walton Court and it would be better if the new ones were called Walton Court North and Walton Court South without the reference to an estate that is not actually in the Town.
29. The District Ward of Bedgrove contains the Bedgrove Estate – a distinct area with its own planning regulations and identity – and the main part of the old Parish of Walton which, until the last District revision, was part of a ward called Grange (which also happens to be the name of a local school). Your proposed Bedgrove North Town ward contains none of the Bedgrove estate and does not consider itself to be part of Bedgrove. Whilst we understand the reasons for names that reflect the District Ward as well as the Town Ward, we feel that this ward would better be called Bedgrove – Walton or, if that is felt to close in name to Walton Court for comfort, Bedgrove - Grange

Summary

30. We welcome the inclusion of Granborough in the Winslow Division.
31. We believe that Thornborough should be part of the Buckingham North Division rather than the Winslow Division
32. We recommend that Buckingham North Division be renamed Buckingham North East
33. We strongly support the creation of the new Stone and Waddesdon Division
34. We believe that the inclusion of Bierton and Hulcott in the same Division as Aston Clinton is inappropriate and that their inclusion in Wing would be preferable despite the consequent electoral imbalance.
35. If it is not possible to remove Bierton and Hulcott from the Aston Clinton & Bierton Division, then we would propose that Oldham's Meadows Ward of Bierton Parish be moved from Aylesbury East to Aston Clinton and Bierton.
36. The number of councillors for Aylesbury Town should be 25 and there should be a second member for Central Ward, as has been the case since May 2011.
37. The number of Councillors in certain wards of Aylesbury Town should be changed as follows – Elmhurst from 3 to 2; Southcourt from 2 to 3; Oakfield South from 1 to 2 and Bedgrove North from 2 to 1.
38. The Aylesbury Town wards of Walton Court & Hawkslade North and South should be renamed Walton Court North and South
39. The Aylesbury Town Ward of Bedgrove North should be renamed either Bedgrove –Walton or Bedgrove – Grange

Yours sincerely



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on behalf of Aylesbury and Buckingham Constituency Liberal Democrats.

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