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Area your submission refers to: Oxfordshire

Organisation you belong to: parish/town council

Feedback: The attached statement has been prepared on behalf of Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council (of which I am Chair). The statement has been prepared in conjunction with Baldons Parish Council and with the knowledge of our County Councillor. The County Councillor for the ward in which the Baldons sit is also aware that the Parishes are seeking to be included in the same ward. Should there be any queries please do not hesitate to contact, or the Parish Clerk (e-mail: www.nunehampc.webs.com)

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Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council – response to the second stage of consultation on the review of County Council wards within Oxfordshire.

Executive Summary

- It is suggested that the number of councillors and the ward boundaries be finally developed in tandem and that, from hereon, the logic of ward divisions takes precedence in informing the final number of County Councillors.
- The desire to reduce the number of councillors suggested by other groups is recognised and is acceptable if the reduction produces wards that are NOT:
 - covering such large areas that some or all parishes cannot be equally supported by the County Councillor
 - bringing together parishes that are significantly diverse or conflicting in their interests
 - cutting across logical geographical and community links
- There is an over-riding and shared wish for the parishes of Nuneham Courtenay and Marsh and Toot Baldon to be brought back together in the same County ward
- The links to other parishes with which Nuneham Courtenay shares boundaries (and which are currently in the same County ward). These ties are less strong as the distances between village centres are greater than those between Nuneham and the Baldons. However there are some amenities and social issues that mean there are some links with Sandford-upon-Thames, Berinsfield, Culham and Clifton Hampden parishes.

Number of Councillors/Ward boundary changes

The Parish Council has no strong sense of the number of councillors that the County Council should have. There have been concerns that a reduction in the number of councillors could lead to some significantly larger wards. This in turn could lead to poorer representation and Councillors serving parishes that are geographically dispersed and have no common issues or interests leading to difficulties in one person properly representing a ward in which there may well be conflicting or competing demands.

The current proposals to reduce the number of councillors will inevitably lead to the need to reconsider ward boundaries. It would be unfortunate if the decrease in numbers of councillors was accompanied by changes to ward boundaries that either divides parishes between wards (as apparently is the case for one or two parishes) or puts adjoining parishes into different wards arbitrarily, thus ignoring community identity and ties.

It is suggested that, at this stage of the review process, the process should be reversed. As the boundary maps start to be re-drawn to fit the target number of councillors it is entirely possible that either adding back or losing a councillor might result in a more logical boundary structure. It would be unfortunate to stick with the proposed number of councillors if adjustment of the councillor numbers produced a more appropriate arrangement of wards.

The Parish Council would therefore support a decrease in the number of councillors only if this achieved a better arrangement of community identities across the County, even though this results in an increase in the elector to councillor ratio.

Specific local ward boundary issues/need to support community identity

At a previous boundary review the parish of Nuneham Courtenay was put into a different ward from the parishes of Marsh and Toot Baldon (the latter two parishes now operate together under a combined parish council). This is an example of a previous, somewhat arbitrary, split that ignored the strong community identity, joint concerns and physical proximity of the three parishes.

In the course of this review Nuneham Courtenay Parish Council would ask that all consideration is given to putting the parishes back into the same county ward. This view is supported by the Baldons Parish Council and the County Councillor for the ward in which Nuneham Courtenay currently sits. The reasons for this are:

Physical proximity

The village of Nuneham Courtenay (where the majority of the houses in the Parish are located) is immediately adjacent to Marsh Baldon parish. Marsh Baldon village is approx. half a mile from Nuneham Courtenay Village – as close as Nuneham Park (where the majority of the remainder of other Nuneham Courtenay parishioners live).

The parishes of Marsh Baldon and Nuneham Courtenay are inter-twined - the Nuneham Courtenay village signs on the A4074 at the south end of the village are in Marsh Baldon Parish and land to the south of Nuneham Courtenay, that one might expect to be physically part of Nuneham parish (Nuneham Courtenay Arboretum), lies within Marsh Baldon parish. There are properties in the parish that also have land in Marsh Baldon Parish – no 40 Nuneham Courtenay has the same owner as Pylon Farm (Marsh Baldon) and there are routes that connect the two properties.

Highways

The A4074 is the principal road in the area – it links Oxford to Henley and Reading. It passes through Nuneham and Marsh Baldon parishes, The minor road to Toot and Marsh Baldon Villages joins onto the main road at Nuneham Courtenay. The majority of the traffic coming to and from the Baldons ultimately ends up on the A4074. The parishes have recently had to work together closely on signage, speeding and other issues that affect the A4074. The main traffic route is therefore something that links both parishes and in which we have a common interest.

Schools

Children of primary school age in Nuneham Courtenay attend Marsh Baldon School. Nuneham Courtenay is in the catchment area for Wheatley Park School (secondary), as are the Baldons.

Social and village life

There are religious, social and cultural activities that are run in one village or the other that bring people from the parishes together. These include:

- Churches in Marsh and Toot Baldon provide the primary focus for CofE worship in the parishes
- The 'Baldon Players' amateur dramatic group brings together people from the three parishes and uses Nuneham Courtenay Village Hall as its base
- Events and parties bring together senior citizens from the Baldons and Nuneham Courtenay
- A Youth Club run from Marsh Baldon Village Hall has drawn young people from Nuneham and the Baldons

- Other regular and adhoc events held in the villages bring together people from the parishes – keep fit classes, nursery group, wine-tasting, book clubs – all as a result of the close proximity of the villages
- The Baldons Events Committee supports events that aim to bring together the parishes (including fireworks displays and the like) and provides financial support to activities that serve the three parishes
- The annual Baldons Feast (fair and fete) is supported by organisations and people from the Baldons and Nuneham parishes
- There is a joint newsletter that serves all three parishes
- The primary bus services serving the area are heavily used by people in the three parishes
- The villages are on the same postal round
- Pubs/restaurants that are located in each of the villages are a natural focus for the people of the three villages. Although each of the three villages has a pub, two are effectively restaurants and there is no strong sense that each village has there own distinct ‘watering hole’
- The most used footpaths and bridleways in the area are those linking the villages of Marsh Baldon and Nuneham Courtenay – they create a well-used walking and horse riding circuit exists.
- Nuneham Courtenay had, until recently, a shop and post office and a separate flower shop, that were well used by people from both parishes. There is a desire, amongst people in both parishes, to create some form of community shop that would, in whichever village it was based, inevitably draw custom from the other village because of physical proximity.

Representing the population

- The parish councils have discussed the possibility of a single elected body that serves all three parish councils. Although Nuneham Courtenay parishioners have recently expressed a desire to be represented separately, it is entirely possible that this suggestion may be supported at some later date
- The parish councils ensure that issues in one council are reported back to the other. Many of our concerns are the same and we share our ideas and issues with each other. Indeed this response has been developed in conjunction with the Baldons Parish Council
- We share the same MP
- At present the parishes are represented by different district councillors. Nuneham Courtenay shares a district councillor with the adjoining Sandford parish; Marsh Baldon with Garsington. Because the district councillor for Nuneham Courtenay parish is away from the area for a considerable amount of the time we have been increasingly reliant on the District Councillor for the Baldons to provide us with feedback and to represent our case with the district council. If the district ward boundaries were also being reviewed we would be making a similarly strong case for the parishes to have the same district councillor
- The Baldons have recently undertaken and published the results of their Parish Plan (<http://www.baldonsplan.org.uk/>). This includes suggested initiatives that have an impact on, or need to be developed in conjunction with Nuneham Courtenay. This includes highways and transport issues, ideas for a community shop, events and so on.

Links with other Parish Councils

Our current County Councillor serves a number of other parishes. Clearly, apart from the Baldons, other parishes are generally a little more remote when looking at village to village distances.

However consideration needs to be given to the location of any revised ward boundaries and how it could, potentially, reduce links for other parishes for which Nuneham Courtenay has reasonable ties.

The considerations about where the boundary lines are drawn should related to the issues above and the extent to which Nuneham Courtenay parish relates to adjoining parishes. There are links as follows:

- Geographically – Berinsfield and Sandford-on-Thames parishes are the most immediately adjacent. The same main road runs through and the bus services are largely the same. The parish has boundaries with Marsh and Toot Baldon parishes, Culham and Clifton Hampden. Dorchester parish is close by. The river creates a natural dividing feature, but the parish has recently been discussing issues of joint concern with Radley parish (we currently have the same clerk)
- Amenities and social aspects – Berinsfield, Dorchester and Clifton Hampden have the nearest local shops; Berinsfield has a library and leisure centre. Some children in the Baldons and Nuneham Courtenay attend the European School in Culham. The parish tends to look towards Oxford as its nearest municipal centre, whereas there is a sense that parishes to the south start to look towards Reading. There are doctors' surgeries in Clifton Hampden and Berinsfield and it is believed that many people in the Baldons and Nuneham Courtenay are registered with the Clifton Hampden surgery.