

North Northamptonshire Council

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Comment text:

Dear Sirs Rushden Town Council write with regard to the proposed North Northamptonshire Council Wards within Rushden, we would like to make the following comments. Historically, as a boot and shoe town, with predominately a single industry, Rushden had a very strong community spirit, with the majority of residents living and working within a small area of the town. Despite the demise of the shoe industry Rushden still retains a vibrant community feel. Therefore, to continue this rare community spirit, we consider Rushden should be warded as an entity and the wards not shared with neighbouring towns. Whilst we understand the rationale in the 2013 Boundary review, to give a part of Rushden to the NCC Higham Division, to ensure Higham Ferrers had their own NCC County Councillor, as we now have a Unitary Council this is now not necessary. In theory, it is possible that the ward at present with part of Rushden effectively annexed to Higham Ferrers could be represented by Rushden orientated councillors. However, in practice due to the politics and selection procedures, this invariably leads to chosen councillors being Higham Ferrers centric. This then makes it very difficult for these councillors to give the best representation to residents of the whole ward. The annexing part of a large town such as Rushden to the whole of a small town such as Higham Ferrers has very few precedents and normally works the other way round. This latter arrangement as we have seen, works to the detriment of the larger town, whereas, with a large town annexing a small town then this does enable the wider reaching needs and aspirations of the larger town to more easily accommodate those of the smaller town to mutual benefit. This is not happening with the present arrangement and why it needs to be changed. We consider ideally there should be two councillors for each NNC ward. Were Higham Ferrers to take part of Rushden, thus potentially depriving Rushden of 1 councillor, this could result in a councillor ratio of 5 to 3 or 5 to 2 councillors, which are very inequitable splits based on voters. Additionally, with Rushden initially having 3 wards each with 2 councillors, even though there is an argument for 7 councillors, with the anticipated population growth it will be easy to increase one particular ward to 3 councillors where the growth can occur. Thus, our proposal for initially 3 wards of 2 councillors also incorporates some forward planning to enable simple expansion of one ward to 3 councillors. Rushden is a designated Growth Town and in order to achieve a cohesive development it is essential that all principal councillors are purely Rushden based and thus have the same objectives. Members from Higham Ferrers who represent parts of the much larger Rushden will necessarily find conflicts of interest due to the inevitable different needs and aspirations of the two towns. Rushden has accepted significant growth and hopefully the corresponding central infrastructure enhancement, whereas Higham Ferrers has no major desire for further housing and cannot develop central infrastructure. An example of this is that Rushden already has over 1000 flats in its town centre, representing 70% of all properties in the area, and is very concerned about potential further increases. This is essentially would be of little concern to Higham Ferrers councillors who may actually support such developments, firstly due to lack of concern, but secondly to prevent similar flatted developments being built in Higham Ferrers, thus creating a conflict of interest when reviewing planning applications. Residents living in the Rushden area covered by Higham Ferrers councillors are currently very confused by the situation. It is not clear where to go for specific advice combined with the lack of knowledge the Higham Ferrers councillors have of Rushden. Rushden councillors have many years of local knowledge and contacts which is not readily available to the Higham Ferrers councillors. Similarly for these residents, when a planning issue arises in the ward covered by Higham Ferrers councillors, only the Higham Ferrers councillors are consulted. The views of Rushden councillors are necessarily not considered. As above there can be significant differences in the approach and responses which could be seriously detrimental to Rushden. This is highlighted by the presence of several major facilities in the existing ward including Rushden Lakes, the only secondary school, the police and fire station and Spencer Park. The projected number of voters in Rushden at 25,889 a potential of 6.41 NNC councillors. This would give a very logical split

at present with 3 wards of 2 councillors. With Higham Ferrers having no part of Rushden then they would qualify for 2 councillors and this allows for some population growth. This is a very equitable split with 6 councillors in Rushden and 2 councillors in Higham Ferrers which almost exactly mirrors the ratio of voters. To summarise we consider the most logically and equitable solution for ward boundaries, would be three wards with Sartoris ward comprising the town council wards of Sartoris East and West and the current Bates ward, Pemberton Ward comprising the town council's current Pemberton and Spencer South wards, and a newly named Rushden Lakes ward that would be combination of Rushden Town Council's Spencer North ward and Hayden Ward. We consider the Rushden Lakes ward could become a 3 councillor ward once the proposed Sustainable Urban Extension (2,500 homes) has been build out. We do hope you will give our comments full consideration as they come from our established Town Council that has first-hand experience of the problems associated with the current ward configuration. Rushden Town Council, Rushden Hall, Rushden, [REDACTED]

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded