

Dudley

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Comment text:

Related subject: Halesowen

Please find attached submission from the three Belle Vale ward Councillors, Cllr Daniel Bevan, Peter Dobb and myself.

Attached Documents:

- Belle Vale Draft Proposals Consultation Submission.pdf

Local Government Boundary Review – Dudley MBC

Belle Vale Ward Draft Proposals Response – Cllrs Simon Phipps, Peter Dobb and Daniel Bevan

1. We welcome the incorporation of our proposed changes to boundaries on the Belle Vale and Cradley border. We are glad that commissioners agree that these ward boundaries would make for more appropriate and convenient local government.
2. Our proposals for boundary changes on the Hayley Green & Cradley South border were not adopted, referred to in the original report or acknowledged in the 'Belle Vale Councillors proposal' map provided on the LG BCE website. Therefore, we would like to draw commissioners' attention to those proposals once again contained with paragraph's 10 to 13 of our response to the initial consultation. We feel this would help to resolve issues caused by a small new-built estate that is not linked by road with any part of the ward it currently sits in.

Response to other Initial Consultation Proposals

3. In response to proposal 87118, we believe the proposed transfer of what is referred to as "the north-eastern triangle of Belle Vale" to Halesowen North ward is a flawed proposal which should not be adopted.
4. This area of housing, commonly known as the Lodgefield Estate, is nestled in between a borough boundary with Sandwell MBC and a ward boundary with Halesowen North along Coombs Road.
5. However, the Halesowen North ward does not provide a direct continuation of housing with which the Lodgefield Estate could be sensibly linked. Instead, the western side of Coombs Road consists entirely of industrial and business units which separates the Lodgefield Estate from any residential part of Halesowen North ward.
6. The closest residential area in Halesowen North ward is around Cocksheds Lane. It is separated from Belle Vale ward by a borough boundary with Sandwell MBC and shares no common border with another ward in Dudley MBC. Therefore, the two housing areas would only be linked by the industrial and business area to the west of Coombs Road.
7. The only residential area that the Lodgefield Estate borders within the Dudley MBC boundary is on Haden Hill Road, in Belle Vale ward. In our opinion, it would be nonsensical to move the estate to the Halesowen North ward with which it shares no residential boundaries, and it would make the community an outlier in an otherwise contiguous housing area.
8. When considering local links, it is important to note that the housing estate in Halesowen North around Cocksheds Lane is located just a few minutes' walk away from Blackheath town centre. Whilst Blackheath itself is not within the Dudley MBC boundary, people living in that area would consider Blackheath their local town centre.
9. This cannot be said for the Lodgefield Estate. It is geographically placed evenly between the two centres, but many residents on the estate will have far more local links with Halesowen Town Centre than Blackheath.
10. For instance, many people on the Lodgefield Estate would have been patients at Coombswood Surgery on Coombs Road. When this surgery was closed, it merged with Halesowen Health Centre in Halesowen Town Centre, where many residents will still access GP services.
11. Therefore, moving the Lodgefield Estate to the Halesowen North ward would link the community with areas that do not look towards Halesowen Town Centre as their local

commercial centre, such as Shell Corner, that naturally look towards Blackheath as their local centre.

12. The same respondent also suggests moving two polling districts (R01 and R02) from Hayley Green & Cradley South into Belle Ward. These two polling districts form part of the Fatherless Barn estate, known affectionately locally by some as “The Barn”.
13. It has a fierce local identity amongst residents, and it is true that both polling districts must be kept together to respect local ties. They are distinctively one community which is part of the wider Cradley area, although it does have a sensible geographical boundary to the north of the area along Two Gates.
14. Given the flaws with the proposal to transfer the Lodgefield Estate out of this ward which should not be adopted, it would cause an unacceptable electoral variance for either of these two polling districts to transfer into the Belle Vale ward, making the ward far too large.
15. Additionally, the respondent claims that the “Tanfield Estate” and the wider T04 polling district would be better suited in the Hayley Green & Cradley South ward. We believe the respondent is actually referring to the Tanhouse Estate around Tanhouse Lane. This would not be an acceptable scenario as it would cause a confusing and divisive boundary within the heart of Colley Gate, which is the commercial centre of the Cradley area.
16. Colley Gate, Colley Lane, Chapelhouse Lane and Windmill Hill contain a number of businesses, public services and community venues such as Cradley Library, Chapelhouse Surgery, local convenience stores and pubs. Currently, these are split between the T02, T03 and T04 polling districts.
17. No attempt to split the commercial centre of Colley Gate would respect local ties in Cradley, pulling apart the heart of the area.
18. We believe the respondent has, in the interests of achieve pure electoral equality, sacrificed local ties and convenient local government. It is clear from the Draft Proposals that there is no need to eliminate all discrepancies in electoral figures between the wards in Halesowen. Therefore, we ask that commissioners reject proposal 87118.
19. Another respondent has also made representations regarding the Cradley area in proposal 87107.
20. Clearly the respondent has positive intentions and recognises the difficult circumstances in which commissioners must operate by meeting parameters other than solely reflecting local ties and communities. We agree with him that Cradley is a distinct local community with its own identity. Indeed, Cllr Phipps has lived in Cradley his whole life and is acutely aware of local ties and identity.
21. However, we would also point out that Cradley has a Halesowen address and postcode, demonstrating that Cradley, distinct as it is, does fall under the wider Halesowen township. Therefore, shared boundaries with Halesowen wards should not present an issue for local representation so long as those boundaries make for sensible local government.
22. Whilst we acknowledge the Cradley residential area is currently split between the Belle Vale, Cradley & Wollescote and Hayley Green & Cradley South wards, we feel the current boundaries, with our minor modifications, are the best way to distribute the area whilst respecting local ties and maintaining the heart of the Cradley area, College Gate, represented in one community.
23. The current ward patterns largely ensure that the majority of Cradley remains with the Colley Gate commercial centre, the Fatherless Barn community remains as one within Hayley Green & Cradley South, and the Belle Vale area of Cradley that sits on the valley facing Halesowen remains together in a ward that takes its name from the area. Our minor modifications help

to eliminate some confusing boundaries and better respect the ties between the communities referred to above.

24. There are also no possible alternative proposals that make Cradley a singular ward that would accurately reflect local ties elsewhere in Halesowen and meet the commission's requirements for elector numbers.
25. For instance, the respondent's suggestion for a Central Halesowen ward joined with parts of Hayley Green would lead to electoral figures in that area being far too high that is allowed by the commission. The effect of this would leave the remaining areas of Hayley Green far too low but redistribution in any form to the other wards in Halesowen ward would make at least two of the three wards too large. As Halesowen is the south-western border of Dudley MBC, there is no possibility of redistribution elsewhere, making a pattern of boundaries where there are no crossed wards between Cradley and Halesowen impossible.
26. There is no other pattern of wards that will reflect local ties across Halesowen and meet the electoral numbers required without the Belle Vale and Fatherless Barn areas of Cradley being included within a ward that shares representation with some part of Halesowen.
27. Additionally, moving the Wollescote part of this ward towards a Stourbridge ward would also cause unacceptable electoral figure discrepancies and the further breaking of local ties within other wards. The knock-on effects lead the Stourbridge area to spill over into Brierley Hill and Wordsley, that are distinct communities that share commonalities more with each other than the rest of Stourbridge.
28. To ensure that there are not more damaging ramifications for ward boundaries across Halesowen and Stourbridge, we ask commissioners to reject this proposal as it would break local ties and create wards with an unacceptable number of electors elsewhere.