

South Staffordshire District Council

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Submission to the Boundary Commission Review

Locality 2 covers three District Wards and 3 Parish Councils and this document has been prepared with all the Locality 2 members, that is 5 District Councillors, who are all Conservative.

The District Wards of Brewwood and Coven and Wheaton Aston, Bishop's Wood and Lapley currently run conterminously with the following three Parishes: -

Blymhill & Weston-under-Lizard Parish. (B&W)

- Currently served by 2 Wheaton Aston, Bishop's Wood and Lapley (WBL) District Councillors.
- It is made up of the larger village of Weston-under-Lizard (approximately 350 residents) – situated on the main A5 Road, and smaller villages of Blymhill, Blymhill Common, Blymhill Lawn, Brineton, Brockhurst Chadwell, Great Chadwell and Orslow (approximately 400 residents), who's character can be described as isolated and rural.
- Weston-under-Lizard, having been mentioned in the Domesday Book in 1086 has developed as an estate village attached to a large Country estate, Weston Park, the ancestral home of the Earls of Bradford.
- Blymhill and the smaller surrounding villages and hamlets was also mentioned the Domesday book, being called in 1086, Brumhelle. Again its origins can traced back to the Weston Park estate and the need to provide housing for estate workers, but the area currently is dominated a large growers farm – PDM. There is one public house in the area – the Red Lion at Great Chatwell.
- As this isolated Parish borders Shropshire, some of the facilities accessed by the residents of these villages are more likely to be in the Shropshire area such as Shrop-Doc and Shifnal/Telford/Newport Shopping Centres, although it is known that some residents do use Bishop's Wood and Brewwood schools, as well as the medical facilities at Brewwood.
- The Parish borders the Parish boundaries of Brewwood & Coven and Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston.

Brewood & Coven, with Bishop's Wood and Coven Heath Parish. (B&C)

- Currently served by 3 Brewwood and Coven District Councillors.
- The Parish of Brewwood and Coven (B&C), has for some considerable time contained four Parish Wards – Bishop's Wood, Brewwood, Coven and Coven Heath, and is currently the largest Parish area covering some 12,500 hectares. Here has been confusion on the part of the residents in Bishop's Wood where they regularly contact current B&C Ward District Councillors regarding issues, both locally and nationally, and who have had to signpost Residents to WBL Ward District Councillors. It has not assisted (and this has been commented on more than a few occasions by residents of Bishop's Wood, Weston-under-Lizard and Blymhill Lawn) that the current Parish Boundaries are conterminous with the County Council Brewwood Division but not with the current District Council wards.
- Brewwood (approximately 4,500 residents) is the largest of the four villages in this Parish,

and boasted a recorded population of 51 households in 1086, putting it in the largest 20% of settlements recorded in the Domesday Book. It is noted that prior to this date, a Roman settlement was based at this location, as well as an Anglo Saxon settlement. Brewwood was regularly referred to as a town – after its medieval size, market permissions and close association with the Catholic faith (led by the local landowning family, the Gifford's) and the Church of England (closely associated with Lichfield Diocese, as the Bishop held a manor house in the village). Today with five public houses (The Bridge, The Lion, The Oakley, The Swan and The Stirrups), several shops, many smaller entrepreneurial businesses, a modern Doctors surgery, two primary schools, one middle school and a large private school (St Dominic's), the village is seen as a centre for many of the surrounding smaller villages.

- Coven (approximately 4,500 residents) is the second largest village in the Parish, and is known to have been an Anglo Saxon settlement, prior to being mentioned in the Domesday book in 1086. It was known as a working village for the amount of foundries, locksmiths and small cottage industry. Today it has three public houses (The Anchor, The Harrows Inn and The Paradise), several shops, smaller entrepreneurial businesses and one primary school.
- Bishop's Wood (approximately 800 residents) was possibly named after an early country retreat for the Bishop of Lichfield did not develop until 1844, when a decision was made to enclose the land in the area. By 1851, the Church of St John the Baptist was consecrated and a schoolhouse was built. Today it has a primary school and one public house (The Royal Oak).
- Coven Heath (approximately 350 residents) seems for a long period of time to have been mainly uninhabited save the occasional farmhouse. There is some evidence that from 1883 that a small residential community had begun to develop with the appearance of a small church (now closed) and a public house (now also closed). Now the village is made up of residential properties and mobile home parks.
- The northern boundary of the current B&C Parish Ward runs alongside the major Road, the A5 and is seen as a natural barrier and abuts the Parish boundaries of B&W and Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston. The Southern boundary of the current boundary of B&C Parish is a little less identifiable but generally follows the West Coast Mainline.

Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston Parish. (LSW).

- Currently served by 2 Wheaton Aston, Bishop's Wood and Lapley (WBL) District Councillors.
- The Parish of Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston serves the villages of Wheaton Aston, Lapley and Stretton including Marston, Water Eaton and Ivetsey Bank and abuts the Parish Boundaries of both B&W and B&C. Again residents in the Stretton area – who generally reflect a Brewwood postcode – have contacted B&C District Councillors and have had to be redirected to WBL District Councillors.
- Lapley (approximately 350 residents) is mentioned in the Domesday book under the original named of Lepelie, with no shops, public houses or other facilities, apart from a church.
- Stretton (approx 130 residents) appears to have developed during the 1500's and is dominated by a local landowners estate (Stretton Hall), who own almost exclusively the whole village.
- Wheaton Aston (approximately 2,500 residents) and it is referred to in the Domesday

Book in 1086, as a local settlement associated with Lapley. Historically it has long been associated with woodcutting and the quality of its grown cereal products. It did become somewhat of a notorious village in the 1800's and was locally known as 'Wicked' Aston due to lax opening hours and the Cannock coal miners frequenting of the village. Today the village has three public houses (The Bradford Arms, Coach and Horses and The Hartley Arms), several shops, many smaller entrepreneurial businesses and a primary school.

a) Which Communities should be part of the same ward?

This submission is based upon the notion that any new warding arrangements should, whilst, providing electoral equality for electors, wherever possible run with current and longstanding Parish Boundaries and Polling Districts, with established identified Communities to give access to effective local government.

It is on this basis that this submission is not supporting any significant changes to the existing boundaries.

- It is proposed that the District warding patterns be changed to reflect the current Parish Boundaries, with the two Parishes of B&W and B&C being joined as one District ward, keeping the village/community identities intact. This would allow three elected representatives for this Ward, an electorate of 2193 (+3% above the suggested average number of electors per Councillor of 2133) residents per Councillor, preserving the community identities of the villages and electoral equality for that electorate.
- This larger ward, it is suggested would be called the 'Blymhill and Brewood Ward', and would make sense for local communities, whilst continuing to reflect current Parish and County areas, as well as polling districts.
- The remaining parish of LSW would allow for a one elected representative ward of 2132 (-less than one % below the suggested average number of electors per Councillor of 2133) members of the electorate and would remain as the 'Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston' Ward, again being both a practical and sensible solution, and reflecting effective and convenient local government.

b) What facilities do the three Parishes share?

Shared Medical Services - People in Bishop's Wood/ Coven/Coven Heath used Brewood GP's practice, which has also included satellite doctor's surgeries in both Wheaton Aston and Coven, to support local residents. None of the areas mentioned used any dental services as the nearest are located in either Penkridge/Codsall or Newport/Shifnal in Shropshire.

It was little less clear with residents of Weston-under-Lizard and Blymhill, whether any of the local medical services provided by the Brewood GP's practice were their first port of call or whether they take the opportunity to use the services of the Shropshire Health Service (Shrop-doc).

B&C Parish also runs a voluntary car scheme to transport residents to hospital. This is supported by all four Parish Wards in the B&C area, as well as in the Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston area.

Schools - In relation to first/primary schools – Bishop’s Wood, Brewwood - with two (one, CofE and one, Catholic), Coven and Wheaton Aston have well subscribed first/primary schools, but it is known that children attend the Bishop’s Wood and Brewwood Schools from Blymhill, Coven, Coven Heath, Lapley and Weston-Under-Lizard.

There is only one middle school in the area – the Brewwood Middle School, which takes students from Bishop’s Wood/Coven/Coven Heath/Wheaton Aston areas. Some students from the Blymhill and Weston-Under Lizard area attend Shropshire schools in Shifnal.

There are no High schools in the three Parish areas and the large majority of students travel either to Wolgarston in Penkridge or Codsall High. Some students from the Wheaton Aston/Weston-Under-Lizard and Blymhill areas travel to Shifnal and Newport Schools in Shropshire.

Churches – Although Bishop’s Wood/Brewwood/Coven/Lapley/Stretton and Wheaton Aston have CofE Churches, with large regular congregations, it is known that people travel from other villages in the three Parish areas to attend those churches. It is not unusual to find people in the congregation at Brewwood from Coven/Wheaton Aston and Bishop’s Wood. Similarly some residents of Brewwood travel to Coven to attend the Coven Church.

There is only one Catholic Church in the three Parishes’ at Brewwood and many from Bishop’s Wood/Coven/Wheaton Aston/Weston-Under-Lizard travel to Brewwood to join the congregation.

There are two Methodist chapels in Brewwood and Coven, which are again regularly attended by residents from other villages in the three parish areas. It is unclear of the travel distance of residents to the Zion Church in Wheaton Aston, the only Congregational Church in the three Parishes.

Community/Village Halls – All three Parishes are reasonably well serviced with community/village halls being located at Bishop’s Wood /Blymhill/Brewwood/Coven/Wheaton Aston. All run events, which are supported by local residents from both their own village and neighbouring villages. Examples of this are the series of tribute nights at Brewwood village hall (Jubilee Hall) where residents from Bishop’s Wood/Coven/Wheaton Aston attend on a regular basis, the Bishop’s Wood Beer Festival and ‘Party in the park’ – residents from Brewwood/Coven/Wheaton Aston attend and the Coven Pantomime – again supported by residents from Brewwood/Coven Heath and Wheaton Aston.

Best use of the village halls (Blymhill/Bishop’s Wood/Brewwood) are made with monthly film nights in conjunction with the rural film company, who provide up-to-date cinema releases for showing. These are well supported by local residents from both the local and surrounding villages.

Blymhill also runs a social club and has a snooker room attached to its village hall, and has recently set up its own community shop, which is being supported by residents from the local and neighbouring villages.

A variety of differing clubs and social groups are run from the various differing village halls including WI’s, craft groups, and zumba/dance groups.

Leisure facilities – There are no leisure centres in the three Parish areas but there are a variety of Public spaces provided and maintained by the local Parishes, which include a variety of children’s play equipment and adult exercise equipment.

In the B&C Parish, a Parish sports association also books out playing fields for use – currently primarily for Football and Cricket for both males and females (juniors and adults). These are extremely well supported by all four wards in the B&C area.

In the B&C Parish, there are vibrant and well-supported Brownies, Cub and Scout groups with members attending from all Parish Wards and a good interchange between the groups in the differing villages.

In LSW there is a long standing Cubs group with members attending from both the Parish of LSW and B&W.

Shared Events – A variety of events are run within the all the villages of the Parishes, which are extremely well supported by residents of neighbouring villages. Examples are Christmas Lights Ceremonies (all coordinated so they do not clash dates) – which attract crowds of upto and more than 500 people in some villages, Music Festivals – again attracting large crowds, Wakes and War memorial events.

Shopping - Most people from the three Parishes would normally attend larger shopping centres outside of the area – either Codsall/ Cannock/ Stafford /Telford/Newport/Shifnal. For quick local shopping – residents from Bishop’s Wood and Wheaton Aston may attend Brewwood or Codsall.

Library Services – Although there is a County Council run mobile library Service, Brewwood also has a well used Community managed library which is regularly visited by residents from Blymhill, Bishop’s Wood, Brewwood, Coven, Coven Heath, Lapley, Weston-under-Lizard and Wheaton Aston.

c) What issues do neighbouring communities in the three Parishes face that they have in common?

Traffic Congestion –The M54 motorway with its main trunk road of the A449 and the A5 pass through the three Parishes, bringing large volumes of traffic to disperse through the area. The West Midlands Interchange is a multi-million-pound rail freight development that when completed will see about 15000 HGV movements per 24 hours as well as 2000 private car journeys for employees flooding the road network increasing congestion to all roads.

Lack of Rural Transport - It was a common theme for all of the communities – in all three Parish areas – that the biggest issue faced is the lack of rural transport. This is especially challenging for younger residents, focusing on gaining or keeping employment. A regular quote heard from residents in the three Parishes is ‘you don’t buy a house in this area unless you have a car’.

Green Belt erosion - The other major concern for many residents in all three Parishes is perceived view of the erosion of the Green Belt and the village curtilage extensions, with new housing developments impacting upon village sizes, Road Infrastructure and increased traffic volumes. This last comment is also borne out by the concern that some of the villages are becoming ‘rat runs’ for the traveller using small country lanes to move northwards towards

Stafford and beyond, increasing the traffic volume considerably. With land at Featherstone ROF earmarked for industrial development, along with ambitions to also develop an adjacent site for a Park and Ride further increasing pressure on green open spaces, and all potentially increasing local road transport problems in the area.

d. Have there been new housing or commercial developments that have changed the focus of communities?

Please also see answer to f) below.

All three of the Parishes have expressed concerns about housing developments impacting upon quiet rural villages with again pressure upon local services and Road infrastructure.

There is a lengthy debate about the new housing developments increasing the size of villages to the point that they are no longer rural but more akin to semi-urbanised, but still receiving rural services.

e. Are there roads, railways or other features that people believe form strong boundaries between neighbourhoods?

Several major Roads and Railway networks provide strong boundaries between the Parishes. The A5 provides a boundary between B&C parish and LWS Parish. The Parish of Blymhill and Weston straddle the A5 but the village/community of Weston does so also. It would therefore not be natural to split this parish along the A5. The M54 provides the boundary between Coven Heath and Wolverhampton. The A449 cuts through the Parish of B&C as the communities of Coven and Coven Heath are on either side of the Road, the west coast main line is the Parish boundary in this area. This appears to have provided – and still provides a strong and substantial boundary allowing the strong identity to remain intact.

The village of Weston-Under Lizard, within the Parish of Blymhill and Weston-Under-Lizard, is cut in half by the major A5 Road running through it but also has as it's boundary the Chester Road, down to the Blymhill boundary which is defined by the major A41 Road.

f. Other

The three Parishes are surrounded by large rural or industrialised areas – the i54 development and its recent extension, the Weston Park estate, the four ashes industrial estate, the Bericote development and the PDM farm estate. The proposed development of the Royal Ordnance Factory at Featherstone – with the major Roadwork's to be undertaken through Coven Heath and the permission to develop the West Midlands Interchange near to the four ashes industrial estate are also going to have a substantial impact upon the character on the area, with the increased amount of traffic and potential pressure to provide extra housing and other services e.g. overnight HGV parking and facilities.

Although the employees and employers of these areas may not be residents in the area, their existence does lead to extra-generated work for locally elected members and should be taken into account.

g. Summary and Submission.

There is clear evidence of strong village and community identity, with substantial shared facilities between the three Parishes. There also appear to be shared issues reflected between the three Parishes, and the proposed submission takes into account the strong community ties of the three Parishes, whilst still providing access to effective local government.