

Fenland District Council

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Organisation Name: Fenland District Council

Comment text:

Cllr Sarah Bligh Current Elected Member for Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary Ward Regarding the proposed changes to the current ward of Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary I attended the briefing/presentation held via Microsoft Team on 16th March 2022. The very first point you made was that you would never allow politics to play a part in any boundary review. This is EXACTLY what is happening here, the makeup of Fenland District Council is 27 Conservative Councillors and 12 Opposition Councillors, collectively known as the Fenland Independent Alliance (FIA) made up of Independents, Lib Dems & Green Party members. So, any draft version submitted by Fenland District Council as their official consultation response has had to go through Full Council and because of the majority of Councillors are Conservative, the vote will be skewed in their favour. Any voting regarding LGBCE at Fenland District Council have been subjected to a recorded vote and so therefore this is publicly available information. This is a failure to adhere to your own policies from the off. You then went on to outline that you had three criteria that you will strive to work with. In this consultation I will respond to these one by one. 1) Electoral Equality • The current variance for Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary Ward for 2021 figures is +6% (4188 electors) and for 2027 is +3.6% (4566 electors) • The variance for Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary based on the 41-member scheme is +8.9% (4566 electors) • The variance for Wisbech St Mary and Elm Ward in the scheme being supported by Fenland District Council which is also the basis on your draft scheme is +9.6% (6731 electors). How is that adhering to you own policy of electoral equality? 2) Community Identities & Interests This part of your criteria, I find baffling as to how you can ignore your own policy so badly. By splitting the current warding arrangement, you are ignoring the concerns raised the Parish Councils, Community Groups and residents alike. The village of Murrow will succumb to your proposed changes. They will not only find themselves split between two Parish Councils and having already been split off into their own ward of the Wisbech St Mary Council resulting from the failings that came from the previous Cambridgeshire County Council boundary review, they now face being split apart by a Fenland District Council warding review. I would like to specifically draw attention to the lack of support the parish of Wisbech St Mary (excluding the Murrow ward of Wisbech St. Mary Parish Council separated off after the last boundary review, that has a different County Councillor!!!!) receives from its elected members on Cambridgeshire County Council, one of which has not been to a Parish Council meeting in over two years, without any apologies and finds that acceptable, the other representative has been approximately three times in the last two years. As previously mentioned, Murrow has grown and developed over the years along the boundary line of Wisbech St. Mary Parish and Parson Drove Parish. Namely parts of Back Road, Murrow Bank, Mill Road, Silvers Lane and Seadyke Bank are all in the village of Murrow geographically and forms a large proportion of the population, but are in the Parish of Parson Drove and the rest of Murrow are within Wisbech St. Mary Parish boundary During 2018 myself and my fellow District Councillor developed and branded the Ward Community Speedwatch to do everything we could to listen to residents' concerns regarding rural speeding, and create a mechanism for which the data could be used to help deliver more permanent speed calming measures, it concerns me greatly that this may be disbanded especially as we are now starting to accumulate enough data to apply for funding. There are numerous other community groups that have developed over the years that work within the two Parishes. This demonstrates the community identity that has been developed over the years. Should the proposed split of the ward occur then there is a danger that these groups will lose focus. Examples of which include, but not limited to: • Royal British Legion • Murrow Book Café • Parochial Church Council • Community Speed Watch • Street Pride Groups co-operate closely • John Bends Charities operate across the Parishes • Village Hall Committees work together • Friends of the Cage • Village Voices magazine predominantly cover the Parishes of Wisbech St Mary and Parson Drove • Parson Drove Car Show has volunteers that are from both Parishes. There are also many projects that have successfully been delivered between the Parish Councils of Wisbech St

Mary & Parson Drove due to the close working relationship that has been developed over many decades. Examples of which include but again not limited to: • Many Local Highways Initiative schemes submitted to the County Council • A drain side walkway between the villages of Parson Drove and Murrow is being developed for launch this year • Citizen Advice Bureau outreach sessions • Parish Councillors Training Sessions • Streetlighting agreements along Back Road, Murrow • Admin support between the two Parish Councils • Information sharing on various projects and schemes such as bin replacements etc. How does ignoring all this support the proposed draft scheme and adhere to your Community Identities & Interests? 3) Effective & Convenient Local Government The Current warding arrangement of Parson Drove and Wisbech St. Mary ward (at its widest point) is approx. 10 miles across by road and geographically, is currently the second largest ward. The proposed ward of Wisbech St Mary and Elm stretches out to a staggering 17 miles across by road. To put that into context it is only 13 miles from Wisbech town centre to Kings Lynn!!!! We live in a time that we need to be inclusive to disabilities and considerate to restrictive issues. How would someone desperate to be a Councillor that cares deeply about their community but doesn't drive expected to ever be able to represent a ward so vast? There are no direct bus routes across this ward, so the Councillor would NEED to be able to drive and that is not inclusive to any individual becoming a Councillor. A District Councillor is expected to attend Parish Council meetings and if an individual was elected that couldn't drive it would naturally see areas of the ward under represented which would result in ineffective government. With those points aside, to travel across the proposed ward of WSM & Elm, even if you were a driver, it would only be possible by crossing the A47 and the River Nene (both of which I consider natural barriers) or by driving through Wisbech. Where there is existing issues accessing Wisbech from the Western Villages due to North Brink having traffic flow and bottle neck problems. The sheer distance of this proposed ward goes against your policy for effective and convenient Local Government. Summary Changing the Parson Drove and Wisbech St. Mary ward to the Wisbech St. Mary and Elm ward goes against every single one of your policies. This boundary revision has been suggested and approved through Fenland District Council to serve political agendas and not the communities. Unfortunately, the LGBCE are being used as the vessel to apply the agendas. The Fenland District Council scheme seems to have Wisbech at its epicentre and not the towns with the growth and development namely Chatteris and Whittlesey. Wisbech Town Council make mention of their desire to incorporate Leverington without local support or a consultation response from Leverington Parish Council. Don't make the assumption that what Wisbech Town Council wants is without concern or political agenda. I wish to make my thoughts known, and plead for you to look closely at the points made and to note my support for the 41-member scheme which would leave all the rural villages alone. Do not let gerrymandering win.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded