

## Fenland District Council

### Personal Details:

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### Comment text:

I wish to place my objection to the proposed ward changes across Fenland, particularly the change proposed for Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary ward, for which I am a District and Parish Cllr. It is disappointing that you have taken on board largely the FDC submission, with minimal input from the FIA submission. I have been on both Working Groups for boundary review in 2012/13 and 2022, I wish to point out the stark difference in approach taken by the District Council for the current review. The review in 2012/13 had almost unanimous support from Cllrs of all groups and demonstrated a clear approach to get consensus agreement, with points taken on board from all groups. It should also be noted for that review the District Council sought to engage with the wider community, including obtaining Town and Parish Council input, prior to them putting forward a formal submission to the LGBCE. This process has not been followed for the current review and all input from opposition Cllrs at the District Council has been disregarded and ignored at each stage. Opposition Cllrs requested a recorded vote to demonstrate this was only supported by the whipped Cllrs of the Conservative group. The latest submission is clearly driven by a political agenda to split up the wards of opposition Councillors, with the Conservative Group pushing through its proposals without any support from the opposition. The LGBCE have stated they will not be influenced by politics, if this is the case then the original submission by FDC and changes being proposed by FDC on the latest submission should be treated as such. I want to address the shortcomings of the proposed ward changes using the LGBCE Criterion, these points mainly relate to the ward I represent, but I have included some more general observations. Electoral Equality This criterion appears to be used to justify the changes to the detriment of the other criteria, which is at odds with the information provided that all three criteria were equal in relevance. The FIA suggested a 41-member warding arrangement that would keep the existing rural wards and communities largely as they are. This system has worked well for a significant number of years in terms of local governance. The proposed FIA approach sought to concentrate the changes where the main areas of growth and development were expected, namely Chatteris and Whittlesey. Community Cohesion This criterion has been largely ignored for the rural wards and the proposals will have a major detrimental impact. This is the case for the ward I represent of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary, particularly the village of Murrow. There are many strong ties including voluntary groups and family connections between the villages of Murrow and Parson Drove, which have been pointed out by the respective submissions by the Parish Councils. These should not be discounted, merely to adhere to one other criterion namely electoral equality, driven by changes elsewhere in the district. Many residents are not aware of the proposed changes, due to lack of publicity, however those that I have spoken to are concerned with the changes being proposed and the impact it will have. I am involved in many local groups and can confirm that residents of Murrow and Parson Drove regularly interact as one community, which the Parish Councils have listed in their previous submission. However, to give some more context here are just a few examples I can personally provide: I volunteer with the local branch of the Royal British Legion to collect money for the Poppy appeal each year. I go house to house in both villages of Parson Drove and Murrow. I also attend both services (Parson Drove and Murrow) at the war memorials each year, with many other residents from both villages in attendance. Recently I was at the annual Sausage Supper at Parson Drove Village Hall, this was attended by people from both villages almost in equal measure, including donations for the auction to raise funds for the village hall. During the Covid 19 Pandemic the Parish Councils of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary set up the Helping Hands scheme to ensure medicines and food was delivered to vulnerable members of our villages. The volunteers came from all the villages in the ward and helped across the whole ward ensuring deliveries were made. This voluntary scheme ran from March 2020 to July 2021. We used the pharmacies at Parson Drove and North Brink to ensure people received their medicines when needed. We estimate we helped hundreds of people across the ward of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary ward during this time. I

believe a strong reason for the success of the group was the willingness of volunteers to travel to neighbouring villages for deliveries, as they felt we were part of a wider community. These are just a few examples of many I can provide, but clearly give the sense of community identity shared between the villages within the existing ward of Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary. Effective Local Governance The proposed changes will have a detrimental impact on effective local governance particularly for the village of Murrow which often has projects delivered by both Parish Councils working together. The combination of Wisbech St Mary Parish with Elm Parish is not a good fit given the major natural barrier of the A47 & River Nene running through the middle of this proposed ward. This acts as a deterrent to people travelling to each of these Parishes, with there being almost no interaction between them. The road network in this new proposed ward is very poor as there are no direct routes between the Parishes, with travel being via indirect routes that would add considerable travel times to get to locations at either end of each Parish. The latest FDC submission uses the justification that natural boundaries should be used for the changes to the warding arrangements in and around the town of March, where they are proposing changes to the LGBCE proposal. This same reason should be a major factor in discounting the proposed ward of Wisbech St Mary and Elm, as it will not work effectively. The issue of natural boundaries has been clearly demonstrated by the introduction of the latest County Council Divisions from 2017, where March North and Waldersey was created. This division is far too large and interaction with county councillors in the Wisbech St Mary Parish, part of this division is very low with infrequent attendance at meetings. It should also be noted that during the last County Council elections, no election literature was delivered to residents in the majority of Wisbech St Mary Parish area by the successful candidates, which is a poor electoral and subsequently local governance outcome. An additional element to point out is that the village of Murrow was put into the Roman Bank division, which again is a poor outcome for the residents and further changes to Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary ward will have a further detrimental impact to them, resulting in an even more complex arrangement for which Cllrs represent the different parts of the village. Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary ward has been identified as an area of deprivation where projects have been delivered to support the area, such as Pathfinder funding (Fenland Links) and the children's centre in Murrow via the Sure Start scheme. If the ward is split and combined with other areas, will this mean the targeted support will stop in the future? This would be another example of a poor outcome for local governance purposes. I also have some wider observations on the district council warding arrangements to make. The FIA made a proposal to keep the existing Benwick, Coates and Eastrea ward with some minor amendments. I note the LGBCE stated "We also agree that there is strong evidence that Benwick parish lacks community ties to Whittlesey and is best placed in a ward with Doddington parish." However, this is a direct contradiction of the LGBCE review from 2012/13 where the only ward that you allowed to be above the recommended 10% elector variance was Benwick, Coates and Eastrea, which resulted in a projected variance of 12%. This recognised the need to protect communities of interest with the villages in the ward, with the consequent identity and challenges they shared. At the time it was noted residents in the villages of Benwick, Coates and Eastrea ward did not associate themselves with the town of Whittlesey. The LGBCE accepted this fact at the time of the 2012/13 review and decided these villages should remain in their own ward, given the similarities they shared. There is very little to have changed this view over the last 10 years and the current proposal is therefore inconsistent with the results of the 2012/13 review. I would also like to point out that the Leverington residents I have spoken too, disagree with being joined in with Wisbech Town, they are proud of the fact they are a village and want it to remain so and do not believe it should be joined onto the Town. It also raises the question why the Town Council assertion regarding Leverington has been taken at face value by the LGBCE without considering the views of Leverington Parish Council and residents. It is worth noting that many Wisbech Town Cllrs are double or triple hatters and are in the Conservative Group at FDC and driven by their own agenda. In the 2012/2013 review the LGBCE used its power to flex the number of Cllrs from 40 to 39 to ensure the number of Cllrs reflected wards that had a coherent identity. I would therefore urge the LGBCE to use its powers again on the current review to change from the proposed 42 Cllrs to 41, to again ensure the pattern of wards reflect established identities within wards, particularly for the rural villages.

### Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded