

[REDACTED]

---

**From:** theclerk@wsmparishcouncil.org.uk  
**Sent:** 19 May 2022 12:44  
**To:** reviews  
**Subject:** Fenland Electoral Review  
**Attachments:** LGBCE 2nd Response WSM PC.pdf  
  
**Categories:** Matt, Submissions

Good Afternoon

Please find attached the 2nd official consultation response of Wisbech St Mary Parish Council.

If you could confirm receipt, that would be appreciated.

Kind Regards,  
**Sarah Bligh**  
Parish Clerk & RFO

**Wisbech St. Mary Parish Council**

[REDACTED]  
[TheClerk@wsmparishcouncil.org.uk](mailto:TheClerk@wsmparishcouncil.org.uk)  
[www.wsmparishcouncil.org.uk](http://www.wsmparishcouncil.org.uk)

The information contained in this e-mail is confidential and may be privileged. It is intended for the addressee(s) only. If you are not the intended recipient, please delete this e-mail immediately. The contents of this e-mail must not be disclosed or copied without the sender's consent. We cannot accept any responsibility for viruses, so please scan all attachments.

This email has been scanned by BullGuard antivirus protection.  
For more info visit [www.bullguard.com](http://www.bullguard.com)

# Wisbech St Mary Parish Council

## LGBCE – 2<sup>nd</sup> Consultation Response

### Regarding the proposed changes to the current ward of **Parson Drove & Wisbech St Mary**

Wisbech St Mary Parish Council attended the briefing/presentation held via Microsoft Team on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022. At the briefing you outlined the three criteria that you work towards. This response highlights where we believe your criteria are not being adhered to.

#### **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), which the Parish Council supports as it can facilitate the rural wards in Fenland maintaining their existing community arrangements.
- 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). This is near the far end of the 10% variance that the LGBCE seeks to avoid and could well mean in future reviews that the warding arrangements would need to be changed again, which is hardly future proofing the scheme being proposed.

**Therefore, we feel this is not adhering to you own policy of electoral equality while future proofing any new scheme of wards.**

#### **2) Community Identities & Interests**

The village of Murrow will be severely affected by 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, but they also now face being split apart by a Fenland District Council warding review.

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.

Murrow is recognised as an area of deprivation due to the rural isolation (see latest County Council Transport Plan) and poor health outcomes it experiences. Therefore, special regard needs to be given to this village to ensure that these issues are not exacerbated. Splitting the village can only lead to poorer outcomes.

There are numerous 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 branch covers Parson Drove and Murrow, who organise Remembrance Sunday ceremonies and poppy appeal collection across the two villages.
- Murrow Book Café has a large cross over of residents from both villages.
- Parochial Church Council covers Parson Drove and Murrow, Murrow residents are buried in the churchyard at Parson Drove and it is also worthy of note that both Parish Councils award grants for the upkeep of the grave yard grass cutting.
- Community Speed Watch operates across both Parishes
- Street Pride Groups co-operate closely across the Parishes, helping out at events in different villages.
- The John Bends Charities operate across the Parishes
- Village Hall Committees work closely together co-ordinating events. Parson Drove Village Hall has a coffee morning where residents of Parson Drove and Murrow meet.
- Friends of the Cage have volunteers from Parson Drove and Murrow
- 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.

It should also be noted that many families have members spread across the area, living in the adjacent villages. Many residents of Murrow also go to Parson Drove to use the facilities there, such as Post Office, Pubs and Convenience store.

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 have been submitted to improve road safety and infrastructure
- A drain side walkway between the villages of Parson Drove and Murrow is being developed for launch this year
- Citizen Advice Bureau outreach sessions were funded jointly by both Parish Councils
- Parish Councillors Training Sessions are organised across the Parish Councils
- Streetlighting agreements along Back Road, Murrow have been co-ordinated
- Admin support between the two Parish Councils is regular
- Information sharing on various projects and schemes such as bin replacements, etc is a regular feature and often co-ordinated between the Parish Councils.

The Parish Council find it baffling as to how you can ignore this part of your criteria so badly. By splitting the current warding arrangement, you are ignoring the concerns raised by not only the Parish Council but by Community Groups and residents alike.

**Your proposal therefore ignores these criteria and the impact it will have on the Parishes of Wisbech St Mary and Parson Drove and in particular the village of Murrow. The proposal clearly ignores the Community Identities & Interests that exist.**

### **3) Effective & Convenient Local Government**

The Current warding arrangement of Parson Drove and Wisbech St. Mary ward (at its widest point) is only approx. 10 miles across by road and is contained in an area to the North and West of the A47 / River Nene. The proposed ward of Wisbech St Mary and Elm stretches to a staggering 17 miles across by road. To put that into context it is only 13 miles by road from Wisbech town centre to Kings Lynn!

To travel across the proposed ward of WSM & Elm, if you were a driver, it would only be possible by crossing the A47 and the River Nene (both of which the Parish Council determine as major natural barriers) or by driving through Wisbech. Where there are existing issues accessing Wisbech from the Western Villages due to North Brink having traffic flow and bottle neck problems. Journey times are likely to be 30 minutes or more depending on the time of day. Having such major barriers to travel would lead to poor outcomes regarding effective and convenient local governance. Due to the poor direct road connections, there is very limited engagement of the community across the barriers of the A47 and River Nene.

The latest submission from FDC highlights the issue of having too large a rural ward, hence their changes to the villages of Christchurch and Benwick by adding to areas of March. If this argument is accepted for the FDC it should be accepted as a material matter in relation to the proposed WSM & Elm ward.

We also live in a time that we need to be inclusive to disabilities and people living in rural isolation. It would be almost impossible for someone desperate to be a Councillor that cares deeply about their community but doesn't drive to be able to represent a ward so vast? There are no direct bus routes across the proposed 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 underrepresented which would result in ineffective local government.

It should also be noted that Wisbech St Mary Parish Council considers the local government arrangements for County Councillors since the latest Cambridgeshire County changes to be extremely poor, with hardly any attendance by the County Councillors for March North and Waldersey, which was is a dramatic change on previous arrangements. The proposed new ward would most likely exacerbate this issue, which we believe is down to the large area they cover.

**The sheer distance of this proposed ward, lack of public transport and major physical barriers goes against your criteria 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 criteria**. This proposed boundary revision has been suggested through Fenland District Council to serve political agendas and not the communities. Unfortunately, it appears the LGBCE are being used as the vessel to apply this change.

The LGBCE scheme (based largely on the Fenland District Council scheme) seems to have Wisbech at its epicenter and not the towns where the future growth and development is expected that would lead to electoral inequality 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. We find it extremely disappointing that you are taking the views of Wisbech Town Council (Consisting of a large number of District Councillors who sit on both authorities) on new boundaries in another council's area with first seeking Leverington Parish Councils view.

At the presentation you provided on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, the very first point you made was that you would never allow politics to play a part in any boundary review.

However, by largely adopting the FDC proposal this is EXACTLY what is happening, the make-up 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.

When Fenland District Council have considered and voted on their official response at Full Council the proposals were voted through entirely by the Conservative Group without any opposition Councillor support. This was subjected to a recorded vote and so therefore this is publicly available information. This is a stark contrast to the previous review conducted by the LGBCE in 2012, when there was a consensus of support from all groups. Therefore, FDC have failed to provide a response that takes on board all comments and views. Wisbech St Mary Parish Council is also shocked by the lack of community engagement by FDC to obtain views before submitting a proposal. This is in stark contrast to the previous boundary review in 2012. The conclusion therefore is that the FDC submission can only be viewed as a Conservative Group submission.

The Parish Council again request that you look closely at the points made and to note their support for the 41-member scheme which would leave intact all the rural villages within their existing communities of interest. The LGBCE has the power to flex the number of FDC Councillors, which you have done on the previous review and request you use this power again.