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Consultation Response on Warding Arrangements Across Rushcliffe

I write as current Ward Councillor for Gotham Ward

Current Position

The Gotham Ward includes the Parishes of Gotham, Barton in Fabis, Thrumpton, Kingston on Soar and Ratcliffe on Soar.

It is a single-member Ward with 2,022 electors as of 2020, very close to the average electorate per councillor of 2,058.

The village of Gotham constitutes 65% of the current Ward and acts as a 'hub' for the surrounding, smaller villages. Gotham Primary School is the catchment school for all the villages; the Parish churches form a 'A453 Churches' group (<https://www.453churches.com/>) together; family and historical ties between the villages are strong, with local groups, clubs and sports teams drawing members from the villages.

From a local government perspective, Gotham, Barton & Kingston have Parish Councils. Thrumpton and Ratcliffe have Parish meetings. Over the last 18 months, representatives of the 5 Parish bodies have been increasingly working together. The type of initiatives involved have been responding to the first round of Local Plan consultation; inputting to proposals for the Ratcliffe on Soar power station redevelopment; opposing plans for mineral extraction in Barton; and liaising with the developers of the Fairham development that will see up to 3,000 houses and 50 acres of employment space. This collaborative working demonstrates both the strength of ties between the Parishes and the shared perspectives of what are all rural villages.

It is a coherent and effective Ward in its current state.

Impact of Fairham

The projected growth in Gotham Ward's electorate from 2,022 in 2020 to 4,295 by 2027 is almost entirely attributable to the Fairham development. This can be seen by virtue of the growth in Barton Parish (225 to 2276). The Fairham land falls within Barton Parish, but is significantly separated geographically from Barton village settlement by the A453.

Outline planning permission for up to 3,000 homes at Fairham was granted in January 2018. The first reserved matters application for housing on site has just been submitted.

The Fairham development is essentially sub-urban in character. It directly borders the city of Nottingham at the South edge of Clifton. It will have its own, distinct identity with its own primary school, recreational facilities, and health centre. As a result, it will have its own identity. The sheer eventual size at around 3 times the size of the current Gotham Ward will dwarf its rural village neighbours. The needs of residents will be significantly different than the smaller, rural surrounding villages. I do not consider that including Fairham within the current Gotham Ward would be appropriate or create effective local representation.

The characteristics, and therefore needs of Fairham will be noticeably different from the surrounding villages.

The rural villages are prone to feature historic inter-generational communities (the names inscribed on war memorials in our village halls are still represented heavily amongst today's electoral rolls!); listed building / conservation areas (such as Thrumpton village centre); the preservation of historic landscape is a key concern shared between villages keen to maintain their identity in the face of heavy incursion to the greenbelt; local community buildings such as churches and village halls exist and are of central importance to village life, but the costs of maintenance and modernisation are

challenging; rural and environmental (fly tipping) crime have increased significantly in recent months and are of particular local concern.

The key issues for Fairham during its early years will be different, centring on community formation and development. Infrastructure and facilities will be new, but need the volunteer base to bring them alive. It is unclear at this stage how the common areas will be managed and funded, but the likelihood of a service charge-funded management company raises questions over the role of parish council precepts/responsibilities that are out of keeping with the existing village arrangements. Brand new developments often experience early issues associated with on-going site development/bedding-in, and the new medical centre/schools/playing fields will be issues principally affecting Fairham residents, rather than those of the surrounding villages.

It is acknowledged that the current review will draw boundaries for use from 2023 but use projected data from 2027. This creates an issue in these circumstances (which I'm sure arises frequently) in so far as Fairham is projected to be close to having an appropriate number of electors by 2027, but clearly will not by 2023.

I would like to submit that whatever provision can be made at this stage, should be done so for Fairham to become its own Ward at the earliest opportunity.

Suggested Warding Arrangements for Gotham from 2023

As per above, my 'plan A' would be the retention of the existing Ward, with Fairham becoming its own Ward.

With say 2,000 electors attributed to Fairham, this would reduce the projected size of Gotham by 2027 from 4,295 to 2,295 (-6% variance).

I feel strongly that multi-member Wards should be avoided wherever possible with clear preference in favour of single-member Wards unless unavoidable. Accountability is a pivotal aspect of effective and convenient local government. Multi-member Wards create the possibility for there to be confusion about who is representing residents and how; lack of cohesion in community representation; and a strain on the ability of councillors to manage workload. Do 2 Members (particularly if from different parties/groups) of a Ward with 5,000 electors have 2,500 each or do they really each have 5,000?

In the unfortunate situation where Gotham Ward were to become multi-member Ward, for the reasons given above, I would submit that this should be without Fairham, or failing that with Fairham only for as short a period as possible.

The Gotham Ward villages have more cultural, identity and socio-economic ties with the similar rural villages of the Sutton Bonington Ward than they will do with Fairham.

My 'plan B' would therefore be the creation of a two-member Ward including the existing Gotham (less Fairham say 2,000) @ 2,295; Sutton Bonington Ward @ 1,667; and Normanton on Soar Parish (currently in Leake Ward but with strong geographical and community ties to Sutton Bonington) @ 370. Total electors = 4,332 so 2,166 per Councillor.

It is acknowledged that this proposal leaves the query 'what about Fairham in 2023?' as per above. However, in my submission, given that it is unclear how long it would be before another review, and

the evident disparities between the rural villages and the urban-extension of Fairham – this nettle would be best grabbed now.

Should the growth at Fairham have to stay within the existing Gotham Ward for the purposes of this review, I would hope that the review could include provision to be made for Fairham to become its own Ward as soon as possible.

Creating a 2-member Ward for the existing Gotham Ward boundaries seems silly for the 2023 election, and even by the 2027 projection would see a -13% variance.

If Sutton Bonington Ward were included, the 2023 variance would probably be about right but by 2027 there would be a +22% variance on average electors.