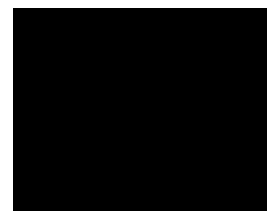


# Upton Snodsbury Parish Council

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19<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**Subject: Comment on the draft recommendations for new ward boundaries in Wychavon 2022.**

To whom it may concern,

We understand that the drive behind the ward boundary rearrangement is to ensure that each councillor is representing approximately the same amount of voters, which appears to be in the region of 2,500. Having reviewed the current ward boundaries, it would appear that the only ward that does not currently fit this remit is Norton and Whittington, with a forecast electorate of 3,344. The remainder of the wards appear to be in the region of 2,500 voters per councillor before and after the indicated changes.

Whilst we can understand the drive to equalise the number of voters per councillor, we strongly believe that the other two factors: Community Interests and Identities, and Effective and Convenient Local Government should be weighted most strongly when determining ward boundaries as these have the greatest weight when resolving parishioners' issues and concerns.

Upton Snodsbury Ward is currently a purely rural ward and comprises numerous small villages of comparatively similar character, issues and challenges, and strong links between the villages. Upton Snodsbury, Peopleton, Broughton Hackett, Spetchley, White Ladies Aston, Grafton Flyford, Naunton Beauchamp, Dormston and Flyford Flavell all have strong social links, sharing schools, churches, and social groups such as Brownies and the Women's Institute. Whittington and Norton are communities located on the edge of the City of Worcester, and in their effectively suburban locations typically look towards Worcester. They have a significantly different suite of issues to the rural villages, with a very different identity and community interests, challenges and issues.

In the latest publically available data (2017<sup>1</sup>), Whittington Parish had a population of 1,090 and the parish has larger proportions of people aged 30-44 and children aged under 8 than

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<https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/component/fileman/file/Documents/Community%20and%20Living/parish-profiles/Parish%20profile%20Whittington%202.pdf?routed=1&container=fileman-files>

in the district as a whole. The population that are aged over 45 is significantly lower than the district.

Upton Snodsbury, Broughton Hackett, White Ladies Aston, Spetchley, Stoulton, Peopleton, Dormston et al. are rural and agriculturally focussed. The latest population estimate for Peopleton (2018<sup>2</sup>) is 590 and the parish has a larger proportion of people aged 65-84 than the district as a whole and smaller proportions of almost all categories under the age of 60. The latest population estimate for White Ladies Aston is 217 (2017<sup>3</sup>) and the parish has a higher proportion of people aged between 45-59 and 65-74. The latest population estimate for Broughton Hackett is 182 (2018<sup>4</sup>) and the parish has a larger proportion of people aged 65-74 than the district as a whole and smaller proportions of young children and twenty somethings. No Wychavon Parish profile has been produced for Upton Snodsbury to date, but analysis of other available data (2020<sup>5</sup>) indicates a population of 385 with a demographic profile similar to the surrounding villages, with over 55% of the residents being over 50. The rural villages clearly have a significantly different demographic, with an aging population that will have very different requirements than the young families that dominate the demographic of Whittington Parish. With regard to Community Interests and Identities it clearly makes no sense for Whittington to be aligned with the rural villages.

In order to accommodate Whittington into the ward, it appears that Peopleton would be removed from the south of the ward and Dormston and Kington in the east. All rural small villages. Including Whittington in the ward at the expense of these villages will result in a very unbalanced population distribution within the ward. The 2017 data indicated that Whittington Parish accommodated 1,090 residents, prior to the extensive recent residential developments in that area (2021 census data are not currently publically available). Under the forecast proposals for the modified Upton Snodsbury and Whittington ward, that would place at least 39.7% of the electorate within one parish of the ward (and likely a higher percentage, following the Whittington housing developments since 2017), located at its far western extremity, with the rest spread fairly evenly across the ward.

Inevitably the local councillor would have to spend a disproportionate amount of their time and focus on the Whittington Parish to the detriment of the other ten parishes within the ward. Notably, this would be attention focussed on a parish that does not share many of the same issues as the remaining ten parishes. During Parish Council meetings the local councillor frequently describes how issues are being tackled that concern several, if not all, villages within the current ward at a time (for example speeding on trunk roads, rural

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<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/component/fileman/file/Documents/Community%20and%20Living/parish-profiles/Parish%20profile%20Peopleton.pdf?routed=1&container=fileman-files>

<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/component/fileman/file/Documents/Community%20and%20Living/parish-profiles/Parish%20profile%20White%20Ladies%20Aston.pdf?routed=1&container=fileman-files>

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<https://www.wychavon.gov.uk/component/fileman/file/Documents/Community%20and%20Living/parish-profiles/Parish%20profile%20Broughton%20Hackett%202.pdf?routed=1&container=fileman-files>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/westmidlands/admin/wychavon/E04010438\\_upton\\_snodsbury/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/westmidlands/admin/wychavon/E04010438_upton_snodsbury/)

crime, deteriorating public transport services etc.). This synergy would risk being lost and consequently the councillor's time would be used less effectively and conveniently.

According to the draft SWDP, Whittington and Norton are scheduled for significant growth in the next few years, with up to 10,000 homes being posited in those areas, in addition to the development over recent years. The character and concerns of both Whittington and Norton Parishes are no longer that of a rural village, and will only become less so as further development occurs and their satellite/suburban character increases. Increasingly more and more of the electorate would be focussed into one parish of the ward, exacerbating the differences between the community interests and identities and making local government less effective and efficient.

The Parish Profile of Norton Juxta Kempsey (2017) is near identical to that of Whittington's, with the latest population estimate being 2557 and the parish having larger proportions of people aged 30-59 and most categories of under 20's than the district as a whole, with a smaller proportions of people aged over 60.

It is understood that the current Whittington and Norton Ward is forecast to reach 3344 members of the electorate, which is clearly significantly over the desired target of 2,500 per councillor. However, with the forecast development and growth within Whittington and Norton illustrated within the draft SWDP, we strongly believe that it would be more appropriate to retain the Whittington and Norton Ward as a single entity, with the two parishes having very similar demographics, characters and interests and, as necessary, introducing a second councillor to the ward to bring the number of voters into line with the desired target as the ward grows in the next few years.

This would seem to be a more logical and reasonable approach than splitting this currently homogenous ward into two and attaching the two halves to regions of very different character, where they would disproportionately affect the locus of the population, character and interests, and upset the efficient, effective and convenient running of local government for reasons that appear to be driven by ensuring equal voter numbers per councillor rather than the effective resolution of local issues of concern. Whilst ensuring equity of voting power per ward is important, the disparity of voter numbers between Whittington and Norton Ward and the remaining wards in Wychavon does not seem to be in imminent danger of reintroducing rotten boroughs into the system and, as described above, as the ward is scheduled to grow rapidly in the coming years, introduction of a second councillor for the ward would resolve the issue with the least amount of disruption. The currently proposed rearrangement of the wards would arbitrarily introduce a significant number of people into the current ward who have very different requirements to the rest of ward, to the detriment of both groups and the effective and convenient running of the ward.

**Yours faithfully**

Martyn Macefield

**Upton Snodsbury Parish Council**