

Liberal Democrat response to Wychavon Boundary Further Limited Consultation

Proposed boundaries

We remain broadly supportive of the original proposed boundaries in Western Wychavon and South Western Wychavon, though we are supportive of the splitting of the Bredon wards into two single member wards. We are broadly supportive of the suggestions in Evesham and South Eastern Wychavon. We also fully support the comments submitted by Wychavon Council.

We would like to stress that original proposals balanced the needs of all areas, not always giving everyone the perfect outcome, but providing a balance that could cater to all. The first review clearly shows consideration of our geography, communities and identities, whereas the second draft leaves some communities in a more imbalanced position. This is particularly the case for Drakes Broughton and Wick. As is common in consultations such as this, it is common for those with the greatest objections to make the loudest noise, and others that are satisfied to remain quiet. We anticipate this will be the situation with this consultation, with new opposition voices now heard. The original plan creates fewer inequalities, with this new plan giving some communities the perfect outcome, and others the least preferred.

In terms of individual wards we would like to express the following:

Original proposal: 7. Drakes Broughton: 1 member, 20. Norton and Stoulton: 1 member, 26. Whittington and Upton Snodsbury: 1 member ward

New proposal: Upton Snodsbury: 1 member, Drakes Broughton, Norton and Whittington: 2 members

As noted in P3 of the Further Draft Recommendations document, two member wards have not been well received in the area. This suggested two-person ward is equally problematic. Drakes Broughton faces Pershore, with those living in the village accessing services in the town, as do those of Peopleton. Those living in Norton and Whittington are very much in the Worcester sphere of influence and will more readily access services in the city. Stoulton and Upton Snodsbury have a more complex relationship with both towns providing services. As a result the areas have very different characters, very different issues and Whittington, Norton and Drakes Broughton would not operate well as one ward.

The suggestion that Drakes Broughton is urbanised and has the character of a small town is disputable. It remains a parish and is not strongly urbanised when compared to Pershore or Broadway. As mentioned previously, we fully supported the original proposed changes for Drakes Broughton and Peopleton. The role of Pershore in these villages is apparent, with most residents accessing the services of the town. These are rural villages with clear identities, and a member would have distinct villages but with similar activities and concerns.

We also remain fully supportive of the proposed boundaries for Norton and Stoulton and Whittington and Upton Snodsbury. Whilst not perfect, they are certainly preferable to the latest recommendation. As proposed in our original submission this is an area about to experience considerable development and will start to become the new town in the area. The impact of the extension from Worcester will be felt in this area, with the connection to the M5 and B4084, allowing commuters to reach Worcester and connections as needed. The new Parkway Station also adds a sense of centrality to this ward as it develops. Again, we would point out that the Whittington and Upton Snodsbury ward would act as a rural divide between Worcester, Pershore and Droitwich. The new developments along the Worcester border has increased the urbanisation but much of this

area remains rural, with rural industries being at the heart of the communities. Villages have a very distinct identity but all have a common theme. There is an increased numbers of commuters in this area, given the proximity to the M5, A44 and Birmingham.

South Western Wychavon

While we completely recognise the valid points made by parishes in their submissions, the original proposals balanced the needs of the communities with the practical limitations of variance. We remain in support of the original proposals from the boundary commission for the following reasons:

1. The original proposals for Wick were acceptable and put a rural parish in a ward with distinct rural parishes. The current proposal to add the village of Wick to Pershore is not in the interests of either Pershore Town, or Wick. To add a village settlement to an existing 3 member ward which focuses on the Town of Pershore is unfair to Wick as they would account for less than 5% of the total population of the ward, leaving their voice hugely diminished. In the originally proposed ward of Fladbury they would account for 15% of the population and would have had a fairer voice. The arguments made about Stoulton and Peopleton being place in Upton Snodsbury can equally be made here for Wick. But the difference here is that Wick is being added to a 3 member ward with a far greater population, and therefore would face a greater loss of voice. If this proposal is to be accepted Wick, as a village of fewer than 200 homes, will always lose out in terms of ward member time/ representation compared to the town. Pershore Town Council would dominate over the much smaller Wick Parish Council.
2. The development issues in the north of Pershore have dominated business for district councillors in recent years and this is projected to continue. By contrast, Wick is unlikely to receive significant development pressure.
3. Whilst geographically close, there is limited community connection between Wick and Pershore. The issues that the residents of Wick village face as a community are significantly different to those of the residents of Pershore. As a result Wick shares common interests with other villages in the Pershore hinterland. There are no advantages to the proposal to include Wick in Pershore Ward, apart from numerical. The original proposals are within the limits set by the commission and suit the needs of the area better.
4. Adding any additional parishes to Pershore ward would also be problematic as the size of the town, and the strong voices within Pershore would overwhelm any smaller parish. We would urge not to add any smaller parishes to this town as the surrounding villages have different identities and not the same issues as the town.
5. The original proposed boundaries of the Eckington ward and Fladbury ward balanced the needs of rural communities with the connectivity and close relationships of the parishes. Whilst we recognise the valid points made by parish councils in this area, the electoral limitations mean that the new proposals create a huge inequality for Wick to provide the optimal situation for the Combertons. On balance, the original proposals meet the needs of all communities, whilst not necessarily providing the perfect situation. We consider this compromise to be fair to all, especially given that these parishes do all have distinct identities on their own.

South Bredon Hill and Elmley Castle and Childwickham

The Liberal Democrat Councillor for the current South Bredon Hill ward has suggested that Elmley Castle, as a Bredon Hill village has a closer sense of identity with the parishes in South Bredon Hill than Sedgeberrow. Elmley Castle fully borders South Bredon Hill and is therefore much closer by foot though further by road than Sedgeberrow. He has proposed a straight swap of Elmley Castle and Sedgeberrow (which would need a renaming of the ward to Sedgeberrow and Childswickham Ward). We would support this and recognise that Netherton could also need to also transfer to South Bredon Hill.