

Buckinghamshire

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Organisation Name: Fulmer Parish Council (Representative of a local organisation)

Comment text:

I am the Chairman of Fulmer Parish Council and the Council has instructed me to write in response to the latest boundary proposals in Buckinghamshire.

Fulmer Parish Council members were extremely surprised and very disappointed to see the latest proposal for boundaries in Buckinghamshire. We have been overwhelmed by comments from our residents about this. Throughout this consultation, the tight ties between Fulmer and Gerrards Cross have been observed in the Commission's proposals, and only a suggestion by Bucks Council that Fulmer be split was a cause for alarm: one which was roundly and rightly rejected by the Commission.

The Commission states three aims of community cohesion, effective government and electoral parity. We recognise that these must be balanced. However this latest proposal greatly harms Fulmer's community cohesion (particularly with its close neighbour Gerrards Cross) for very little improvement in to the poor electoral parity, and the needs of Fulmer's residents will risk being effectively ignored in the ward proposed.

The Aug 2022 report was dominated by the theme of community cohesion. Paragraph 145 of the Aug 2022 report rejects the idea of a ward containing Denham, Wexham and Fulmer, citing the lack of transport and community connection between Denham and Wexham. There is very little by way of community connection or transport connections between Fulmer and Wexham, Stoke Poges, Farnham Royal or Hedgerley save for a single road that goes to Slough via Wexham. In paragraph 19 of the current draft proposals, The Commission appears to have misunderstood our politeness towards our neighbours to the south and honesty about acknowledging their existence as evidence of some sort of community connection. It also fails to understand how significant the ties are between Fulmer and Gerrards Cross. Allow us to correct that

misunderstanding.

The village of Fulmer is like a younger sibling to the town of Gerrards Cross. Most of our institutions jointly cover both areas: The 1st Gerrards Cross and Fulmer Scout Group enrich the lives of our children. The Gerrards Cross and Fulmer Football Club plays on GX Common and the King George's Field, Fulmer. The Church parish worships as a single parish in both St James Gerrards Cross and St James Fulmer with a single Rector leading a single team. Fulmer's infants school feeds its pupils into the schools of Gerrards Cross. If you are a resident of Gerrards Cross who wishes to have an allotment, then you are referred to Fulmer where we provide one and share costs with the Town Council. With few shops, our residents shop in Gerrards Cross - not Wexham or Stoke Poges or Farnham. They catch the train from Gerrards Cross station. In turn the residents of Gerrards Cross frequently enjoy the rural nature of Fulmer and the welcome of our pub. We are proud of our independent identity - as any smaller sibling is - but we recognise the close ties we have.

By contrast, residents tell us that they rarely use facilities in Stoke Poges or Farnham. One told us he gets lost if he goes that way to the M4.

On the tests of effective local government, does the M40 divide Fulmer from Gerrards Cross and provide a natural boundary? In the August report, the Commission in paragraph 148 proposes a ward including Gerrards Cross, Fulmer and Denham noting that the motorway (in this case the M25) does not provide a barrier to the joining up of the communities as there are good road links. The local issues in Fulmer are not dominated by the proximity of an expanding Slough as they are in Wexham and Farnham -- they are much more similar to the rural planning and highways issues of Denham and Gerrards Cross. Fulmer would risk having its priorities ignored in the proposed ward.

On two of the three criteria, then, this proposal is much worse. This brings us to the issue of electoral parity.

It is clear that this latest proposal has sought to address the issues raised by the changes which leave the Farnhams ward with too few people for the 3 councillors proposed but too many for 2 councillors. It is likely a common occurrence when creating wards near a county boundary that respect parish boundaries that the numbers won't add-up and one awkward ward is too big or too small. In this case, the awkward ward has got worse for electoral equality both as a result of boundary changes and also the reduction from 98 to 97 councillors which increases the "par" level.

The Farnhams in 2028 without Fulmer would be 11,521 electors. In a 97-councillor authority, this is 84% of the "par" of 13,701. Lumping Fulmer in adds just 3.5%. This is not a Fulmer-sized problem -- it is a five-Fulmer problem. The effect of reinstating the 98th councillor removed in this latest revision would bring The Farnhams ex-Fulmer to 85% of the new par of 13,563 - nearly a third of the benefit of adding Fulmer.

Adding Fulmer to this ward makes very little difference to the inequality in this ward compared with other options, and it creates considerable harm from the objectives of community cohesion and effective local government.

We would urge the Commission to include Fulmer in the Gerrards Cross ward and if it is not satisfied with the extent that the new Farnhams ward

without Fulmer deviates from the "par" to address that with a change in overall councillor numbers or the addition of a larger settlement which solves the problem rather than a small one which does not.

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David Brackin

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Attached Documents:

None attached