Local Government Boundary Commission Monday 10th July 2023

**REVIEW OF SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL DIVISIONS**

This letter refers to the Shropshire Council response to the Local Government Boundary Commission’s Draft Proposals for Shropshire.

The Shropshire Council response has been prepared by Shropshire Council officers in conjunction with all political parties (Conservative, Green, Labour, Liberal Democrats and Independents) within the Council and all parties are in complete agreement with the Council’s submission. This Council response also encapsulates the views of all Conservative Councillors and Conservative Associations within Shropshire.

We support many of the Commission’s suggestions however, in a small number of areas, we disagree and have put forward alternative suggestions. We have also endeavoured to answer the questions raised by the Commission in your draft proposals.

Shropshire is a large rural county. Whilst there are significant numbers of residents around the County town of Shrewsbury and the other market towns, a substantial number of the population live in very rural and remote areas. Unlike some rural areas that have large communities and then uninhabited areas, Shropshire’s population is thinly spread out across the county.

The topography of the County also needs to be understood as this, very often, determines how communities relate to each other. What looks like a short distance between hamlets and villages on a map looks quite different when you have hills, rivers etc between them to navigate.

Operating as a Councillor in a rural division is very different to operating in an urban area. The number of Parish Councils and Parish Meetings vary across the rural areas, but all expect their councillor to be active and large rural areas can be difficult to cover especially in the winter months.

Having studied the draft proposals, the apparent fixation on numbers for each division does not seem to take into account the rurality and topography of divisions and we urge the Commission to visit many of the areas up for debate before making a final decision. This fixation on numbers can, of course, work both ways. Working across an urban area you are often dealing with just a Town Council and sometimes, in addition, one or two parishes. It is also much easier to get around an urban area and therefore you can assist more residents. Some of our colleagues in urban areas can undertake a leaflet drop across their whole division in three days. It takes rural colleagues at least three weeks and a lot of petrol. We hope the commission will accept that numbers are not the end game but that councillors being able to deliver for their communities is the critical criterion to meet the expectations of their residents.

Our responses and alternative suggestions are clearly laid out with the Council’s submission, but we would like to draw the Commission’s attention to three particular areas:

1. **The Divisions around Shifnal and Albrighton and specifically Shifnal Rural**

A significant amount of time has been spent trying to find a solution for this area. The Commission, by its own admission, does not encourage electoral ‘doughnuts’. However, in this area you are proposing a double ‘doughnut’, and this inevitably leaves an almost unmanageable Shifnal Rural Division. These proposed divisions will not only cross over parliamentary borders, but the Shifnal Rural division would require the councillor to deal with 12 Parish Councils and one Town Council across a significant area. It was this very area that prompted our original submission to ask for an additional councillor. Without this additional seat we believe this division will be unworkable. However, we could not come up with a workable alternative suggestion and we very much doubt that you are happy with your own suggestion in this area.

The crossing of parliamentary borders takes place in other areas too and we believe that residents will find this confusing. It will also make the selection of candidates difficult, and we also believe that it will make life more complicated for the councillor having to deal with two MPs for a single division.

1. **Burnell and Bayston Hill**

The proposal to create a two-member division for these areas has caused the most consternation from all concerned. We remember that the Commission did contemplate creating a separate division for Bayston Hill when the Unitary Council was formed in 2009 but went with a three-member division which has worked very poorly for all concerned, residents, Councillors and the Town and Parish Councils affected.

Bayston Hill is a self-contained village that has its own shops, churches, library, school, medical and dental practices. The Parish Council and residents of Bayston Hill are very clear that they should be represented by one councillor in one division and all political parties have supported this view. This area is already served by one councillor and, in all but name, is one division.

Bayston Hill has very little, if any, connection with the rural division of Burnell except for the A49 which is a notoriously dangerous trunk road. Bayston Hill most certainly looks towards Shrewsbury and whilst it might be assumed that Burnell residents would look to Shrewsbury, in reality Burnell division identifies as a rural division with far closer ties to Church Stretton than Bayston Hill.

By linking these divisions together, the knock-on impact for many other divisions is significant and in our view wholly unnecessary and unhelpful. This disruption and discord can be resolved by creating one single division for Bayston Hill.

Whilst the numbers within this division are outside of what the commission may initially feel is tolerable, again we ask you to consider the community’s views which have been very clearly expressed to us.

1. **Corvedale and Rural Divisions**

In the same way that we request you to focus on communities where electoral numbers are higher than average, we ask you to accept that in some of our most rural areas electoral equality is difficult to achieve due to the rurality and topography of an area. The Corvedale Division is an extremely good example of this. As you will see from the submission this division is the second largest in geographical area and to add another parish would make the division even more difficult to serve, given the natural topographical barriers between Cardington and the Corvedale which may not be immediately apparent from studying a map. For the 2009 review the Commission accepted that Chirbury & Worthen was under the recommended numbers due to geography and topography, and we ask you to do the same in this review for the Corvedale Division.

In closing we would ask that you carefully consider the Council’s submission and to make a visit to Shropshire before finalising your proposals so that you can properly understand more about our rurality and our topography.

We trust that you will make the best decision for the communities and residents of Shropshire.

Yours faithfully,

**LEZLEY PICTON**

Leader of the Conservative Group on Shropshire Council

For, and on behalf of, the Conservative Councillors and Conservative Associations of Shropshire