

Worcestershire

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Related subject: Wythall Division

Response to the proposals by the Local Government Boundary Commission with Changes to the Wythall and Alvechurch Divisions in Worcestershire.

Introduction

This note provides an in-depth analysis and further support for the Worcestershire County Council submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission concerning potential boundary changes to the Wythall and Alvechurch divisions in Worcestershire.

The initial submission from Worcestershire County Council outlined the confusion and lack of representation caused by the current division of Wythall, with the south part falling under the Alvechurch division. This division does not reflect the community's identity or interests, particularly given the distinct issues Wythall faces as well as its proximity to Birmingham and Solihull.

Initial Submission Summary

The initial submission argued for realigning the County division to match the Wythall Parish Council area, offering a more coherent and representative governance structure. This realignment would slightly exceed the target voter representation levels but would ensure residents are represented by individuals familiar with and capable of addressing the area's unique challenges.

Boundary Commission's Response

The Boundary Commission's proposal to create a two-councillor division encompassing Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Beoley, and Wythall, diverged significantly from the council's proposed scheme. This proposal aimed to balance statutory criteria but resulted in a 6% forecast electoral variance and was met with considerable opposition from all parts of the local communities. The concerns centre on the disregard for the cohesive and tight-knit community of Wythall, the division's alignment with natural boundaries, and the unique local issues, notably the severe impact of the 2018 flash flooding and ongoing major developments in adjacent Solihull.

Community Response and Concerns

The community's response to the Boundary Commission's proposal have been overwhelmingly negative. Key points of contention include:

- **Community Cohesion:** Wythall is a tightly-knit community with distinct characteristics and issues, particularly adjoining Birmingham and Solihull.
- **Natural Boundaries:** The A435 acts as a natural boundary that is not considered in the proposed division, leading to an artificial division of the community.
- **Unique Local Issues:** The severe flash flooding in 2018 highlighted the need for focused representation that understands and can address such unique challenges. Distinct issues with the community adjacent to Birmingham and Solihull and the issues facing the Wythall area from adjacent development, infrastructure and incoming crime.
- **Opposition from Local Bodies:** The proposal has not been supported by local community groups, residents, the parish, or the district council, indicating a broad-based disagreement with the Commission's approach.

Recommendations

Given the feedback from the community and local governmental bodies, the following recommendations are proposed to address the concerns raised:

1. **Re-evaluate the Proposed Boundary Changes:** Consideration should be given to the revised proposal put forward by Worcestershire County Council that aligns more closely with the initial submission, whilst respecting the issues with numbers, focusing also on the natural and community-defined boundaries, especially the dense community area to the right of the A435.
2. **Community Engagement and Consultation:** Continuing engagement with the residents of Wythall, as well as Alvechurch, Barnt Green, and surrounding villages, to ensure their view are understood.
3. **Address Unique Local Issues:** Recognize and plan for the unique challenges faced by Wythall, particularly in terms of flood management and the implications of its geographic location and issues adjacent to Birmingham and Solihull.
4. **Consider Future Developments in Alvechurch:** Factor in the high potential for development along the A435 and the M42 in Alvechurch, which could offset the increased voter representation in Wythall.
5. **Statutory Criteria Versus Community Identity:** While statutory criteria are important, it is crucial to weigh these against the significance of community identity and cohesion, which may justify exceptions to electoral variance targets.

Conclusion

The proposed boundary changes by the Boundary Commission have sparked significant concern and opposition within the affected communities. It is imperative that any revisions to the boundaries consider the strong community ties, natural geographical features, and unique challenges facing Wythall and its surrounding areas. The submission by Worcestershire County Council whilst not perfectly aligned with the Wythall Parish area is an acceptable compromise addressing the issues with resident numbers and ensures the dense community is able to be fully and represented in a focussed way.

Attached Documents:

- [response-to-the-proposals-by-the-local-government-boundary-commission-with-changes-to-the-wythall-and-alvechurch-divisions-in-worcestershire.docx](#)

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