

Cheshire East

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Comment text:

Related subject: Knutsford

Please see the attached document.

Attached Documents:

- 20241205-akg---lgbce.pdf

Knutsford Town Council

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND REVIEW OF CHESHIRE EAST

December 2024

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document sets out Knutsford Town Council's objection to the proposal to divide Knutsford into two borough wards and the consequent proposal to divide the Knutsford Town Council Cross Town ward in two.
- 1.2 Knutsford Town Council supports the proposal to make the Knutsford borough ward boundary coterminous with the parish boundary. This creates effective and convenient local government and removes the existing confusion of part of the town being represented as part of a rural ward.

OBJECTION TO DIVISION OF KNUTSFORD WARD

Summary

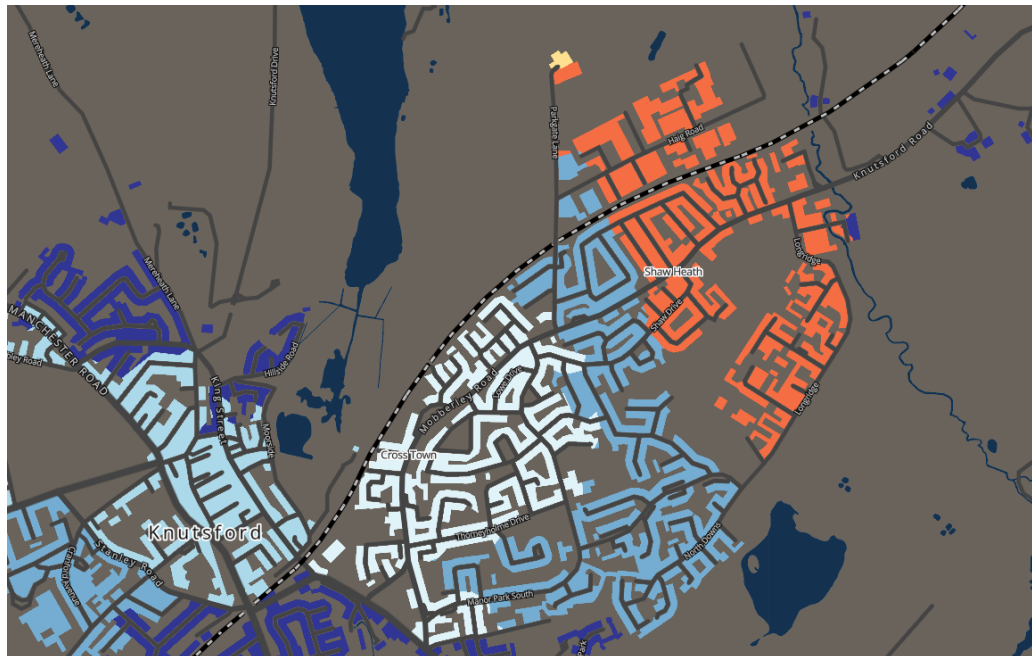
- 2.1 Knutsford Town Council objects to the proposed warding arrangement for Knutsford which would see the town divided into a single member Knutsford North East ward and two member Knutsford South and West ward.
- 2.2 The Town Council believes Knutsford should continue to have a single three-member ward covering the entire parish.
- 2.3 The Town Council rejects the Commission's argument that its proposals would better reflect the statutory criteria and considers that a single three-member ward better reflects the statutory criteria.

Community Identity and Interests

- 2.4 Knutsford is a small market town with a common community identity. The proposed ward arrangement, and how the town has been divided, is illogical and does not reflect any natural community identity; there is nothing about it as a whole that naturally defines it and marks it as distinct from other parts of the town.
- 2.5 The greatest community interest for the majority of residents is that of Knutsford as a whole and this is evidenced by the vast majority of community organisations covering the

whole of Knutsford not small sections of it. There are no community organisations which align with the proposed Knutsford North East ward, which demonstrates that there no existing community identity for this proposed area.

- 2.6 Whilst there will be communities of interest around facilities such as Manor Park School, The Welcome and the Crosstown Community Orchard, these are not restricted to the proposed ward. Manor Park School has pupils from across the town whilst many people, particularly on the western side of the proposed Knutsford North East ward are not regular users of The Welcome. The community orchard has volunteers attending its activity and events from across the whole town and only two of its trustees would live within the Knutsford North East ward.
- 2.7 The residents of the proposed Knutsford North East ward will access services across the whole town. Accessing secondary school across the town, accessing the leisure centre across the town, accessing medical services across the town (the existing surgery within the proposed ward will be closing and the doctors combining into a single medical centre at the existing hospital site), supermarket and leisure shopping are in the town centre and the majority of community events take place in the town centre - it is for this reason that there is a whole Knutsford community identity.
- 2.8 The Town Council does recognise that the proposed ward would include the area of social deprivation, as tinted orange in the plan below. However, it is notable that this comprises approximately only one third of the proposed ward and the Town Council considers that this is not a sufficient justification for divide the town.



- 2.9 The Town Council recognises that due to the issues of deprivation, there is some disconnect between the town's St John's Wood ward and the rest of the town. Two of the Town Council' strategic objectives are to tackle this disconnection whilst providing greater support to tackle deprivation. It is our strongest belief that the proposal to split

Knutsford broadly along socio-economic boundaries as proposed will reinforce a divide and make addressing the underlying issues more challenging. The Town Council's objective is wide cross-community cohesion, the proposal is isolationism.

Effective and Convenient Local Government

- 2.10 In the recent community governance review and at the instigation of the Town Council, its St John's Wood ward was created. This ward was designed around the Longridge and Shaw Heath area (which broadly corresponds with the area of deprivation) with the objective of enhancing its local representation. The creation of this Town Council ward has given the residents of this ward more focused representation than it previously had (when the areas now covered by Cross Town and St John's Wood were one large ward) with three councillors dedicated to this area; the Town Council considers that this has sufficiently provided effective political representation and that the proposed Knutsford North East ward will not contribute further to this.
- 2.11 Since the creation of Cheshire East Council, the Town Council's experience of the co-operation of the three Cheshire East ward members for Knutsford further supports the retention of a three-member ward. The three-member ward enables members to share workload (ensuring that residents always have a councillor to engage with during periods of holiday, illness or otherwise) and additionally enables members to focus on particular areas, e.g. planning or highways, increasing the effectiveness of the town's representation at the borough council. The division of the town will reduce this effective working.

Equality of Representation

- 2.12 A single three-member ward for Knutsford would have an electors per seat ratio of 3,880, at -6% to variance from the borough average. The proposed Knutsford North East would create a ward with -9% variance; whilst still within the 10% threshold, the proposals create a ward with worse equality of representation.
- 2.13 This issue is compounded by the electoral forecast figures including the development of 225 houses on the Land East of Longridge. This application was refused by Cheshire East Council and is currently under appeal. In the event the appeal is dismissed, the ward will have a greater variance, likely over the 10% threshold.
- 2.14 The three member ward therefore offers the best equality of representation for Knutsford residents.

OBJECTION TO DIVISION OF CROSS TOWN PARISH WARD

- 3.1 Knutsford Town Council strongly objects to the consequent proposal to divide its Cross Town ward into two wards, Cross Town South and Cross Town North.

- 3.2 A community governance review was undertaken prior to the 2023 elections, through which the Town Council put in considerable effort to develop proposals for its warding arrangements which represented community identity and provided effective and convenient local government. The result was five wards, with good electoral parity, each electing three members.
- 3.3 The existing arrangement of equal wards with equal numbers of councillors is simple to understand. Residents know they have three councillors representing them on the Town Council and this is easy to communicate to residents. It works well with the existing arrangement for Cheshire East Council as residents are represented by three councillors at each level. The changes would result in an unequal and confusing distribution where:
- a. Some residents would elect one town councillor and two borough councillors
 - b. Some residents would elect two town councillors and one borough councillor
 - c. Some residents would elect three town councillors and one borough councillor
 - d. Some residents would elect three town councillors and two borough councillors

This will lead to confusion and is an impediment to effective and convenient local government. It will be especially confusing around election time when multiple messages will be seen in relation to how electors can vote.

- 3.4 The Town Council operates a committee system with eight committees which undertake the majority of decision making for the council. The council is a busy and growing council with approximately 50 formal meetings per year. This requires a significant level of member time. Our system provides that all committees (except personnel) must have representation from each Town Council ward to ensure that all wards, and thus all residents, are represented in decision making. With three-member wards this system works, enabling members to serve on 3-5 committees which is a manageable workload. The proposal to divide Cross Town ward in two would create a situation where it would not be possible for the member for Cross Town South to be on all committees (both from a practical limit on the number of members on the committee and from a member workload perspective that this would be an excessive demand for a members' time), this would effectively disenfranchise the residents of this ward from local decision making.
- 3.5 The Town Council also gave great consideration to the names of its wards to have warding arrangements that contributed to the sense of community and sense of place. The proposed geographic splitting of the wards undoes this and creates wards that sound unnecessarily administrative. If the Commission does insist on this change to the detriment of the effective working of the Town Council, we request we are specifically consulted on determining alternative names for these wards.