

East Hertfordshire District Council

Personal Details:

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Organisation Name: East Herts Rural Branch Labour Party

Comment text:

East Herts Rural Branch Labour Party: East Herts Rural branch covers all that part of the East Herts District that falls within the North East Hertfordshire constituency. It has 162 members. Specific comments are restricted to our area of the district. Multi-member wards: Multi-member wards work reasonably well in relatively compact, urban settings, especially when councils work on the basis of one third retiring each election year. They do present very large areas to cover in rural areas. This is especially so if the elected councillors are not from the same party, since a single party can informally divide the ward for case-work purposes. It is true that, when the council works on an all-out election every four years, as East Herts does, it is more likely that both, or all three, members will be from the same party. However, the tendency for all the councillors in a multi-member ward to be from the same party has a distorting influence on the make-up of the council. In East Herts, where one party is normally dominant, it increases the likelihood of having little or no opposition to the dominant party, resulting in decisions tending to be taken behind closed doors and then approved by the council with little discussion. Although this may, in our circumstances, be characterised as a special pleading by the Labour Party, we would put it to you that it is, in principle, unhealthy for democracy for any one party to have full control, without any effective opposition. We also believe that the combination of rural and urban areas into one ward is not ideal. However close to the town they are villages and hamlets identify with each other rather than with the town, so that we have sought to avoid this as far as possible. Furthermore, if the town section is the majority, then the rural areas will feel disenfranchised. Future size of electorates: Since we only have the forecast of electorate numbers broken down into the areas that you have used, we do recognise that some of our proposals may need some alteration to make the size of wards suitable. Proposed Buntingford ward: Given our general comments on multi-member wards above, our major objection is to the ward of Buntingford. Nevertheless, we can see the problem that you faced, because, on the projected electorate numbers, Buntingford itself, even without Chipping, Buckland and Wyddial, is too large at 6247 (+18%). Removing the fairly large area to the east of the town itself would reduce this number by very little. Our preferred solution to this problem would be to take as small a part as possible from Buntingford itself – perhaps the most northerly development between Ermine Street and the A10 and add that to a ward (perhaps called Buntingford Rural) with one councillor. This would leave Buntingford as a two member ward. We do not have the projections for this small area to know how many electors are forecast, so that we cannot fully specify the area. In order to minimise the number of electors taken out of Buntingford in order to make Buntingford Rural viable in terms of numbers, we recommend moving the parish of Anstey into the ward. This can be done without upsetting the figures of Little Hadham and the Pelhams and anyway makes sense, since Anstey relates much more to Buntingford than to Little Hadham. Proposed Braughing and Standon ward: To an extent, this ward is subject to the same objections, from our point of view, as Buntingford. Puckeridge is hardly urban, but it is hardly rural either. We note that it was the Conservatives who wished to get rid of Puckeridge as a separate ward, no doubt because they felt it was a vulnerable seat from their point of view. Notably, the forecast numbers make it a viable single-member ward. However, this makes the rest of the ward too large. This could be solved in one of two ways: by adding some of Standon's new housing, such as the development along the Cambridge Road, to Puckeridge, or by adding the parish of Horstead to Buntingford Rural. The latter would also make sense in terms of the relationship of that area to Buntingford, and is, therefore, the preferable solution. It is true that Standon and Puckeridge tend to be seen as an entity, but Standon does have a more rural "feel" and, now that the proposal for an A120 bypass has been ruled out for the foreseeable future by the County Council, continues to be separated from Puckeridge by a very busy road. Proposed Datchworth and Walkern ward: We find this combination as a two-member ward, though not ideal, acceptable, since it is all a fairly

rural area. Furthermore, we cannot see a viable way of splitting it back into two wards on the forecast numbers.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded