

Malvern Hills District Council

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This submission has been prepared by the currently serving four district councillors for the two existing/contiguous wards of West Malvern and Dyson Perrins respectively. While we acknowledge and respect the case for a reduction from four to three district councillors for these two existing wards, we do not consider the proposal to create a new ward (Upper Howsell) appropriate for the area because it splits a well established ward in two and fails to reflect the shared community identity of the existing ward. Instead we would recommend the merging of the whole ward of Dyson Perrins with the neighbouring ward of West Malvern - to create a single new ward of West & North West Malvern and to be served by three (rather than four) district councillors. Please see our uploaded document for a fuller account and evidence base for this alternative proposal for our local area. In particular, we wish to propose instead a three councillor/single ward solution for the same area - one that we consider better satisfies the three main considerations underpinning Boundary Commission reviews,

Uploaded Documents:

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Submission to the Boundary Commission in relation to the Proposals for new Ward Boundaries for Malvern Hills District Council Area.

**Submission from Cllrs Natalie McVey, John Raine, Chris Reed, and Julie Wood
(Malvern Hills District Council)**

The case for a Single Ward for West & North West Malvern, served by three District Councillors.

Introduction

This submission has been prepared in response to the recently published proposals from the Boundary Commission for Malvern Hills District Council area. It has been prepared by the currently serving four district councillors for the two existing/contiguous wards of West Malvern and Dyson Perrins respectively. While we acknowledge and respect the case for a reduction from four to three district councillors to represent residents in these two existing wards, we do not regard the Boundary Commission's proposals (for an enlarged West ward to be served by two councillors, plus a newly-defined Upper Howsell ward to be served by one councillor) as representing the optimal warding structure for this West and North West corner of our town of Malvern.

In particular, we wish to propose instead a three councillor/single ward solution for the same area – one that we consider better satisfies the three main considerations underpinning Boundary Commission reviews, namely:

- 1. Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents*
- 2. Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity and*
- 3. Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.*

A Solution that Sustains Electoral Equality

Rather than endorsing the solution proposed by the Boundary Commission (of a two-member ward for an enlarged West ward, plus a one-member ward for a newly defined Upper Howsell ward), we wish to propose instead a 'three-member ward' serving all of the same territory (i.e. both the proposed enlarged West ward and the newly proposed ward of Upper Howsell). We argue that this would be more appropriate because it would reflect better the existing and established movement/interactivity patterns of residents and the strong similarities of social composition and geographical proximity in this similarly characterised and essentially residential area of north west Malvern. Our proposal in this respect would, of course, make no difference to the consideration of 'electoral equality' – as it would simply group together the two proposed new wards (i.e. the proposed and enlarged West ward, already served by two councillors, with the newly proposed Upper Howsell ward, proposed to be served by just one councillor).

As well as the fact that the town of Malvern already has two wards in which three councillors serve, we note that the Boundary Commission has itself again proposed three-member wards for two areas of the town of Malvern (these being for the Barnards Green area on the one hand, and (again) for Malvern Link on the other). Accordingly, there are precedents within the Commission's proposals for a three-councillor ward to serve the West and North West areas of Malvern as a whole.

A Solution that Better Reflects Community identity

The principal argument underlying our proposal in this respect is that the area defined by the Commission for a new Upper Howsell ward lacks a sufficiently strong underlying rationale – there being no clear naturally-defining boundaries for this area, nor any strong sense of internal community/neighbourhood identity in its own right. In our experience – experience gained over nine years of councillorship in this locality - the area defined as Upper Howsell is indistinguishable from the neighbouring localities of the wider Dyson Perrins ward. Indeed, the Commission’s proposal would only serve artificially to bisect what is a well-established and expansive residential neighbourhood - doing so along and around the axis of Leigh Sinton Road. This seems to us particularly inappropriate because it would divide what is generally perceived locally as a fairly cohesive area of north west Malvern – covering both Beverley Way and its neighbouring streets on the western side of the B4503 (Leigh Sinton Road) and Tanhouse Lane and surrounding streets on the eastern side.

All this area currently falls within the existing Dyson Perrins ward, with Dyson Perrins High School lying at its core (and which has, for the past thirty or so years, lent its name to the current ward). While recognising that the name ‘Upper Howsell’ appears on Ordinance Survey maps for the area, few, if any, residents use that name to describe their address, nor would likely be familiar with its geographical extent as a locality. Instead, most people in this locality would only associate the name ‘Upper Howsell’ with the comparatively short stretch of road running through this part of Malvern (i.e. Upper Howsell Road) and which extends in a north-south direction between Church Road and Tanhouse Lane.

It is also important to emphasise that this whole area of North West Malvern (i.e. north of Church Road/Somers Park Avenue and Belmont Road) is almost wholly residential in character – and that there is neither an obvious ‘service centre’ nor other focal point for the community activity within this area except for Dyson Perrins High School. That said, there are two small supermarkets, in close proximity to one another, on Upper Howsell Road, plus a significantly larger Sainsbury’s supermarket that has opened more recently within the middle of the more recently developed Malvern Vale residential area (which occupies the site of the former Ministry of Defence ‘North Site’ campus) and which, under the Boundary Commission’s proposals, would be added into West ward.

This Malvern Vale area also provides the only ‘community centre’ in the whole north west area of Malvern. The Sainsbury’s supermarket here is much used by residents from across the wider area of north west Malvern and beyond. Conversely, the long-established Anchor Pub, also located midway along Upper Howsell Road, provides the only ‘local’ within the existing Dyson Perrins ward (and so also serves as ‘local’ for residents from the Malvern Vale and Half Key communities further to the west).

Much the same sense of shared identity for the wider north-west area of Malvern can be said to apply in relation to local primary school provision. Somers Park Primary School – with some 250 pupils - is located at the junction of Somers Park Road and Upper Howsell Road (i.e. falling just within the newly-proposed ward of Upper Howsell). However, since 2017, this school has been operating in partnership with a new primary school located in the heart of the nearby Malvern Vale housing development; the two schools sharing a head teacher, operating under a single governing body, and sharing of facilities across both sites as well. Pupils at both Somers Park Primary School and the newer Somers Park (Malvern Vale) School are principally drawn from all areas of North West Malvern, as well as from the wider catchment area of the town and its hinterland. Accordingly, it would seem quite unhelpful if one outcome of the current Boundary Commission review was to introduce a new ward boundary between these two linked schools and their shared catchment area.

A Solution that Supports Effective and Convenient Local Government

Happily, the changes proposed by the Boundary Commission for this north west corner of the town of Malvern seem unlikely to have serious negative implications or unduly complicate the effective and convenient operation of local government, beyond perhaps requiring an additional polling station (e.g. in the Malvern Vale area if it were to become part of West ward). But in this regard, it would seem helpful if the proposed new pattern of ward boundaries by the Boundary Commission were, like the existing ones, to remain 'nesting' within a single County Council Division (Malvern Trinity Division of Worcestershire County Council).

That said, our arguments for linking the whole of the existing two-member Dyson Perrins ward with the existing two-member West Ward, and to create one new three-member ward on the combined footprint, will surely prove a simpler and therefore a more efficient solution for local governance functioning, in particular for electoral administration by the District Council. This we regard as a further benefit arising from the solution that we are advocating in this submission.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we would emphasise the benefits of establishing one new 'three-member' ward to serve both West and North West Malvern (akin to that proposed by the Commission for the newly-defined ward of Barnards Green as well as for Malvern Link). While implying no change with regard to the issue of electoral equality, such a three-member ward would facilitate improved effectiveness for local government in relation to polling station/electoral arrangements. But most importantly, it would better reflect the social geography and key patterns of movement, interactivity and identity within this north west corner of Malvern.

Indeed, had the Boundary Commission reviewers been able to visit the local area personally and experience those aspects of geography, interactivity and community identity, (rather than been restricted largely to desk-based research because of Covid-19) we feel sure that the simpler solution that we are advocating here, of a single three-councillor ward for the whole area of West and North West Malvern, would have been recognised as a more efficient and effective solution.

20th February 2022.

For any further information about this submission, please contact Cllr John W. Raine:

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