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**From:** Chris Boden [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 06 June 2022 19:44  
**To:** reviews  
[REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Fenland Review

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Good evening.

I have for the last seven years been a Town, District and County Councillor representing Whittlesey. I am also the Leader of Fenland District Council

I write to support the Fenland District Council revised proposal for a Council size of 42, split into 18 wards, six fewer than there are now. That proposal was passed by a large majority at the Full Council meeting of FDC on 20<sup>th</sup> May.

I'd like to make representations in respect of the four areas into which you divided the District in your report: Chatteris and surrounding parishes; Whittlesey; March; Wisbech and surrounding parishes.

#### **CHATTERIS AND SURROUNDING PARISHES**

Manea Parish is just too large to be a ward on its own. It's natural to pair Manea with Chatteris as it's only seven years since the How Fen area was removed from Chatteris into Manea, so the LGBCE initial proposals bring back that area (which is about a quarter of the area of the parish of Manea) into a ward which includes part of Chatteris.

Once it's accepted that Manea needs to be joined with Chatteris, there's really not much argument as to how that should be done. Uniquely, Chatteris and Villages was the single area in the District where both the administration and the opposition agreed what the best configuration should be for the new warding arrangements. The LGBCE adopted that arrangement as its initial recommendation and I support that proposal to create two three-member wards.

#### **WHITTLESEY**

The LGBCE adopted the proposals from Whittlesey Town Council and Fenland District Council in respect of Whittlesey Town. We have all felt that the arrangement of including Benwick in a Whittlesey Ward didn't work well – Benwick looks to March for its shopping, secondary school and other services, and this is reflected in the fact that all of the buses which serve Benwick go from, to or through March, whereas there is no bus service between Whittlesey and Benwick. I therefore very much support the LGBCE's initial proposals which exclude Benwick from any Whittlesey Ward.

There is no need, in promoting electoral equality, to include Benwick in with Whittlesey anyway. Whittlesey comfortably qualifies for eight Councillors by itself on the 2027 electorates.

Whittlesey Town Council, at the earlier stage of this review, submitted a detailed analysis as to why their proposed ward boundaries, since adopted by the LGBCE as their initial proposal for Whittlesey, Best satisfy the three statutory criteria. Those reasons supplied by Whittlesey Town Council are still valid, in my opinion. The use of the A605 through the urban part of Whittlesey provides a very clear boundary between north and south Whittlesey. Alderman Jacob's and Sir Harry Smith's Schools' grounds provide a clear and well-understood boundary in north-east Whittlesey. Turves must be included with Coates as people from Turves overwhelmingly use Coates to access the A605. Coates and Eastrea are very clearly defined smaller villages and represent communities which should not be split. King's Delph should be included within a ward to which it has road access better than a farm track. The B1040 and the B1093 are natural connectors of some of the outlying parts of Whittlesey with

Whittlesey Town itself. For all of these reasons I support the proposed district council warding arrangements in the LGBCE's draft proposals.

My only disagreement with the LGBCE Report in respect to Whittlesey is on page 23 of your report: the naming of Town Council Wards. It will cause great confusion to have a "South" Town ward which is not coterminous with the "South" District ward. I suggest that the "South" Town ward be renamed "South & Rural". Similarly, confusion will be caused by the "Stonald" Town ward and the "Whittlesey North-West" District wards having different names but being precisely co-terminous. I'd suggest changing the Town ward name to "Whittlesey North-West".

With the exception of the matters referred to in the immediately preceding paragraph, I support the draft warding arrangements proposed by the LGBCE.

## **MARCH**

I do not agree with the LGBCE's draft recommendations in respect of March and the nearby parishes of Christchurch, Wimblington, Doddington and Benwick. Proposed boundaries within March split communities unnecessarily. The use of small roads such as Myrtle Gove, Robinhood's Lane and Creek Road as boundaries fails to recognise that communities are joined together, rather than separated, by roads such as this, both generally and in those three specific cases. The LGBCE draft proposals fail to utilise the river as a very natural strong boundary from the Town Centre right through to the easternmost point of the river within March; perversely, around 200 houses to the north of the river are proposed to be included in a March East Ward which is otherwise all to the south of the river. The strong boundary there has been ignored and several hundred residents have been left isolated by the Commission's draft proposals, with no way of driving from most of East Ward to that part north of the river without going via March North & Rural Ward (the northbound carriageway of Bridge Street). Additionally, the LGBCE draft recommendation for March North & Rural Ward produces a very large ward, well above quota now (16%) and just a handful of voters short of being more than 10% above quota even in 2027. I appreciate that pure electoral equality is impossible, but where better electoral equality is possible it should be considered, and the proposal agreed by Fenland District Council at its Full Council meeting on May 20<sup>th</sup> not only better satisfies the electoral equality requirement but also addresses all of the other weaknesses in the LGBCE's draft recommendations listed earlier in this paragraph.

The FDC revised proposals include Benwick and Christchurch in with March and allocate 10 councillors to the area. This allows the two strongest boundaries within March to be used in full as ward boundaries: the A141 (Isle of Ely Way) from its bridge over the river to the Town boundary by the Mill Hill Roundabout and the river itself, all the way through the built up area of Town, from the A141 bridge eastwards to the eastern boundary of the Town Council. The full use of these two most striking boundaries in March is a massive improvement on the LGBCE's draft proposals.

But more than that, the remainder of the boundaries proposed by the revised FDC scheme are far stronger than those in the LGBCE draft recommendations. Instead of dividing existing communities by using small residential streets such as Myrtle Grove, Creek Road and Robinhoodfellow's Lane, the FDC revised proposals use just three major roads within March Town as boundaries: the A1101 south of the Town Centre, the A1098 west of the Town Centre, and the Norwood Road/Hundred Road south/north route away from March Centre, which is the secondmost major north/south route in March on that side of the river.

Benwick and Christchurch are both small villages which look to March for all of their secondary school, major shopping and professional services needs. Until 2017 they were both included in March electoral Divisions and it seems natural for them to be included within Wards containing areas towards which they look for so many of their daily requirements. All Benwick buses go to, from or through March. Christchurch, unfortunately, is too small for a bus service.

The Fenland District Council revised warding scheme for March provides better electoral equality than the LGBCE's recommended draft scheme; it doesn't split communities which are united by their small back-streets; it fully utilises the river as a major natural barrier between communities which is a very strong boundary; it uses major roads as

boundaries, not minor ones within communities and it doesn't leave a couple of hundred properties north of the river isolated and cut off from the rest of their proposed ward south of the river.

In terms of March, Doddington, Wimblington, Christchurch and Benwick I therefore oppose the LGBCE draft recommendations and support the revised FDC proposals on the grounds that the revised FDC proposals in all respects better satisfy the LGBCE's three statutory criteria.

## **WISBECH AND VILLAGES**

I support the LGBCE's draft proposals for re-warding in the Wisbech and Villages area.

Within Wisbech Town itself, Wisbech Town Council has overwhelmingly supported these proposals.

The area covered by North Ward is unique in my experience, at least within the UK. People there still talk about themselves living in "North Ward" even though no such ward has existed for several years. That concept of a "North Ward" resonated so strongly with local people that the concept survived within the community despite the ward having been abolished. Whilst similar identity with a specific ward name which is not a local place name can be seen in some parts of the USA, I know of nowhere in the UK where a compass determined ward name has stuck within the local community as a way of identifying itself.

The whole of Walsoken is now proposed to be included in one ward – that rectifies an anomaly which should have been addressed a long time ago. Walsoken has its own identity, its own community centre, even its own high street. It is positive that it is all now united in a single ward together with two other peripheral communities – Waterlees and Staithe.

The Riverside Ward reflects the increasing focus of the Town back upon its river. Until recently, the main thing which united both sides of the river was the serious threat of flooding, but regeneration programmes on both sides of the river are now refocusing the Town upon the river which originally spawned it.

I welcome the inclusion of the more rural part of Wisbech Town in the proposed Leverington Ward. Leverington has effectively become an integral part of Wisbech. I challenge anyone, unless they've checked the map first, to leave Wisbech northwards along the A1101 and then continue straight along the B1169 and identify from the surroundings when Wisbech Town becomes Leverington Parish. In fact, that route goes from being all in Wisbech to being half Wisbech/half Leverington to being all Leverington to being half Wisbech/half Leverington again. But there are several other matters which show just how interdependent and indistinguishable Leverington and that part of Wisbech are.

The Fens is an artificial reclaimed landscape wholly dependent upon water management systems to stop it from flooding. Leverington and the rural western part of Wisbech (down to Barton Road) which would form the new Wisbech Leverington ward are all in the Hillside sub-catchment area of the North Level District Internal Drainage Board. They are interdependent in their drainage and flood alleviation systems. West Wisbech (Barton Road, The Still, Gadds Lane) and South Leverington both depend upon The Still drain for their drainage. The Still drain empties into the White Engine East Drain which also serves North Leverington. The proposed Wisbech Leverington ward very helpfully mirrors the vitally important drainage arrangements in the area.

A very quick check of the internet brought up the following five cases where "Leverington" is being described by local people as being "Wisbech" – many more could be provided through a simple search:

In the following link to a local newspaper article, a theatre production relating to Park House in Leverington is described, by being performed in Wisbech, as being "performed in home town where it all began":

[WISBECH: Rare treat for town as celebrated comedy performed in home town where it all began | Wisbech Standard](#)

The following advertisement from Webbs of Leverington (a business based in Leverington) makes it clear how its target audience self-identifies by heading its advertising offer “Newspaper offers in Wisbech” without separately mentioning Leverington itself:

[Newspaper Offers](#) | [News In Wisbech](#) | [Cambridgeshire](#) | [Webbs of Leverington](#)

And the following three house sale advertisements all describe properties in Leverington Parish as being in Wisbech, with no mention of Leverington (apart from the road name, which you might think would have been a giveaway!):

[3 bedroom detached bungalow for sale in Horseshoe Terrace, Wisbech, PE13 \(rightmove.co.uk\)](#)

[House Prices - Zoopla](#)

[Aspire Homes - Particulars \(rightmove.co.uk\)](#)

All bus services in Leverington go to or from Wisbech.

If you ask someone in Leverington where they live, most often they’ll answer “Wisbech” rather than “Leverington”

It is, for all the reasons above, far from inappropriate that the ward of Wisbech Leverington is being proposed.

The ward in the LGBCE’s draft recommendations containing Newton, Tydd, Gorefield and Parson Drove parishes contains the four least urban of the parishes in Fenland. All four have a single village core but a large more rural and agricultural hinterland. It’s a good mix of four very similar parishes, with no one parish dominating the others in terms of electorate. I’d just suggest that “Roman Bank and Parson Drove” would better reflect the relative sizes of the population of the two elements in that name.

Elm & Wisbech St Mary is, effectively, the old Waldersey area, and possibly should be renamed as such. The two parishes are very similar both in population and in the fact that they both consist of many small villages and settlements located between Wisbech and March.

There are a small number of properties on the north side of Back Road and Seadyke Road in Parson Drove parish which, it has been argued, should be in Wisbech St Mary Parish. No request for a Community Governance Review to that effect has yet been received from any local person there. One of the reasons for that may well be down to the all important drainage again. Seadyke Drain is part of the Highside sub-catchment area. It runs immediately to the south of Seadyke Road and Back Road. Immediately to the north of Seadyke Road we have the Little Seadyke Drain which, despite the similarity of name, drains away entirely separately from the Seadyke Drain and is therefore in a different sub-catchment area: the Baxters Eau sub-catchment area. An area such as the Fens doesn’t have true watersheds – we have a very flat, drained landscape, mostly reclaimed from bogs and marshland. But we do have directional and directed water management systems which have to be highly managed and constantly maintained, and those boundaries are reflected in our North Level District Internal Drainage Board sub-catchment areas. So there is a very good reason for Back Lane and Seadyke Lane forming a parish boundary between Parson Drove and Wisbech St Mary – the roads constitute our equivalent of a watershed.

For all of the reasons given above I support the LGBCE’s draft recommendations for Wisbech and Villages.

Chris Boden  
Whittlesey Town Councillor, Bassenhally Ward  
Fenland District Councillor, Bassenhally Ward, and Leader of the District Council  
Cambridgeshire County Councillor, Whittlesey North Division

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