

John Shephard, WNC Ward member for Moulton



The Local Government Boundary
Commission for England

5 November 2022

Dear Sirs,

West Northamptonshire Review: Moulton Ward

I have lived in the village of Boughton since [REDACTED] 1978. I represented the parish as a member of Daventry District Council from 1984 until its dissolution in 2021. Whilst a DDC councillor I took various chairing roles, including leader. I was elected a member of WNC in 2021; I am currently vice chairman. Those in the Boundary Commission with equally long memories will appreciate that I have thus served as district councillor for Boughton as a single member (Boughton and Pitsford ward, covering just those two parishes), one of two members (Spratton Ward, covering Boughton, Pitsford, Spratton, Harlestone and Church with Chapel Brampton) and at WNC the current three member Moulton Ward. There are pros and cons of all three forms of representation; I cannot say that one is better than the other. I understand that the Commission's approach is to establish 1, 2 and 3 member wards as dictated by community and geographic issues; I entirely agree with that.

I write this letter on the sole issue of the boundary review as it affects Boughton Parish. It is necessary to have a knowledge of the background in order to understand the full community picture today.

From medieval times until the 1920s Boughton was an estate village, latterly owned by the Howard-Vyse family of Boughton Hall. An auction took place by which the quasi feudal arrangement came to an end and from then the village has developed in the usual way as a commuter village of Northampton, invariably described by estate agents as "*highly sought after*". Within the parish is a substantial area of land adjacent to Kingsthorpe which has been long recognized as ripe for development, now known as Buckton Fields (the name derived from the earliest name of the village itself). Development of this land was resisted for a number of years by the LPA. The position today is that 1018 dwellings are consented; a further 85 are the subject of a committee resolution to grant subject to completion of a s106

agreement. Some 700 are complete and occupied; most of the remainder are under construction. In the remainder of the “old village” there are approaching 300 houses.

Residents have been gradually moving in to the Buckton Fields development for six years. A parish community is being formed:

- The housebuilders (Bloor Homes; Martin Grant Homes) marketed the development as being part of Boughton.
- Members of the “old village” have sought to welcome new residents as they have moved in over the past six years. The parish council, church, village school, myself and others have strived to do so.
- A farm shop operates in Buckton Fields and acts as a community centre for all parish residents.
- Six residents of Buckton Fields have been members of the Boughton Parish Council; three are today.
- The parish council is committed to building and operating a new community centre on Buckton Fields.
- On 2nd June 2022 residents from the whole parish gathered in an area of Buckton Fields to celebrate the late queen’s jubilee and light a beacon.
- On 5th June residents from the whole parish met together in Boughton Park for a jubilee picnic.
- Tonight residents from the whole parish will gather in the pocket park in the “old village” for a fireworks party. Some 2000 tickets have been sold, a large proportion to Buckton Fields Residents.

I highlight these matters to evidence my firm view that there is a community of residents of Boughton Parish. I believe this to be self evident; I am obliged to make the argument for it in the light of the WNC response to the Commission’s current review, where the proposition is made that residents of Buckton Fields form (or should be required to form) a part of a community of Kingsthorpe. That is a fanciful suggestion, without foundation, indicative of “*social engineering*”. In evaluating it it is essential for the Commission to know how it came about.

WNC established a working group to report to its Democracy and Standards Committee. Throughout the operation of the group and its report to Committee it was agreed that the new Moulton ward would comprise the parishes of Moulton, Boughton, Pitsford and Overstone. That remained the position and was reflected in the report to Council and draft WNC response to the Commission before members meeting as the Council on Thursday last, 3rd November 2022, which read, as to Boughton and Pitsford Parishes:

“The Parishes of Boughton and Pitsford, situated to the west and north of Moulton village, share close community ties with Moulton. Residents from these parishes rely on the community facilities in Moulton village, including medical and retail facilities. Both Pitsford and Boughton share a church benefice enhancing community ties. There are good transport links between each of these parishes and Moulton. In light of these close ties and convenient transport links, the Council proposes to include these parishes within the Moulton ward.”

However, it was clear that these words were inconsistent with the map and description of the North Kingsthorpe ward, which had the effect of taking Buckton Fields out of the parish of Boughton and putting it into the North Kingsthorpe ward. I made this point to members at Council and in the course of the council meeting, the following words were added to the draft response and are contained in the WNC response to the Commission:

“...noting that the development of Buckton Fields is part of the proposed Kingsthorpe North ward.”

The change came about in this way.

A local WNC member representing the current Kingsthorpe ward saw the final position as agreed by the working group and committee as unsatisfactory to him. He made covert representations to the lead officer, justified by the electorate numbers involved, that Buckton Fields should be moved to his ward. The officer was satisfied that the numbers were indeed improved by that adjustment and made the change on the map.

In the WNC written response to the Commission as to Kingsthorpe North Ward no attempt is made to address the community issue. The arguments put are both that the parish of Boughton forms part of a Moulton community and the Buckton Fields part of the parish forms or should be required to form the Kingsthorpe community. That is plainly bizarre and unsustainable. The only specific reference in the response to Buckton Fields is that allowing it to remain in Moulton ward would mean that it would be *“part of a predominantly rural ward”* which is, of course, exactly what residents intended when they bought their home in Buckton Fields.

Whilst it is right that the adjustment does help bring Kingsthorpe North nearer to the 4227 electors per member benchmark, it gives Moulton ward a -7% variance. Returning Buckton Fields to Moulton would clearly improve that position.

I cannot identify the rationale for the member seeking the adjustment. I cannot rule out the motivation of perceived electoral advantage.

Before Council on 3rd November its members had agreed that no proposed amendments would be made to the draft response to the Commission. It was too late for that. Doing so would place impossible demands on officers over the weekend of 5/6 November dealing with consequential number adjustments. It was left to individual members to make their own representations to the Commission.

I urge the Commission to give weight to my evidence as to the issue of community, to endorse the view of the committee and working group and form the new Moulton ward by the simple inclusion of the three parishes in their entirety. As far as I know, only one member of WNC supports the contrary proposition.

Yours sincerely

John Shephard