

Oxfordshire

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Comment text:

Related subject: Wantage & Grove

I welcome the decision to reinstate the Grove division (removed in 2004) based on the Parish boundary but have strong concerns about the proposed new Charlton, Blewberry and Hendreds division proposal which would not reflect community ties and effectively disenfranchise electors from the services and infrastructure they use. I think there is a better way to represent the electors of the area - see attached letter for details.

Attached Documents:

- LGBCE Response.pdf



Our Ref: LGBCE/Oxon/Consultation/001/BJG

Date: 23 October 2023

Dear Sir or Madam,

RE: Proposed Boundary Changes Wantage & Grove

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed boundary changes for Oxfordshire County Council and the planned increase of representatives from 63 to 69. I note that the Commission proposals will not result in every division meeting the 8449 electors target.

My comments are made as an individual constituent and relate solely to the proposals as they concern Wantage & Grove.

WANTAGE & GROVE

BACKGROUND

Because an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty lies to the south of Wantage & Grove, the main axis of possible development as agreed in existing Local Plans will occur along the A417:

- east towards the Hendreds,
- west towards the Challows, and the A338
- north around Grove.

East Challow sits approximately 150m from Wantage due to the Dandara development, and although the planning authority has rejected plans to join East Challow to Wantage the unstoppable requirement to develop locally makes it inevitable that the joining process will be realised under future Local Plans especially if the proposed Wantage Western Link Road is completed between Wantage and West Challow.

It is to be welcomed that the Commission is reviewing the Oxfordshire divisions to create better “electoral equality” and, where it is sensible, seek coterminosity to reduce electoral confusion.

GROVE DIVISION

I welcome the proposal in the current review of the Local Government Boundary Commission to reverse its 2004 decision which merged Wantage and Grove and reduce the combined division representation from three County Councillors down to a two-member division of the County.

The 2004 decision failed to account for the already known planned expansion of Grove and did not recognise that Grove is a distinct community from Wantage.

It also appears that the Commission is also proposing that Grove division should include Grove Bridge this change would reflect the Parish boundary. Grove Bridge is currently part of a Wantage

division called 'Segsbury and Grove Bridge'. I think that it is sensible for the whole of Grove to have one County representative.

Together Grove North, and Grove Bridge have 6509 electors in 2023. This is predicted to rise to 8983 in 2029 (+38%).¹ 8983 is 534 electors above the target 8449 by 2029 meaning that electorally the proposal will make Grove large enough to meet the Commission requirements on equality of electoral size and coterminous.

CHARLTON, BLEWBERRY & HENDREDS

The Commission is proposing to remove Charlton from the Wantage division and instead create a new division stretching from Garston Lane in Wantage to Blewberry over 8.4 miles (13.5Km) away as the crow flies. I have strong concerns about this proposal as the new division would not reflect community ties.

Charlton is an integrated part of the town of Wantage, and it clearly recognises itself as such being the location of:

- Wantage Community Hospital,
- Wantage & Grove Cricket Club, and
- Wantage Community Support Centre.

The County submission identifies that Charlton (SSC 1, 2, and 3), an urban suburb of Wantage, would make up 56% of the electorate in the new ward potentially swamping the voices and requirements of the more rural locations like Lockinge (155) and Ardington (255). The Wantage boundary for this new division would also not be coterminous with the town council ward.

Additionally, I suspect that people access services most convenient to them. Including places close to Didcot such as Blewberry, Chilton, and Upton in the new division would almost certainly disenfranchise them from the services and infrastructure they use which would then be in a different division. These places have more in common with nearby Harwell, or Cholsey than Charlton.

WANTAGE

The approach of the County Council and the Local Government Boundary Commission to the growing population of Wantage is inconsistent with how every other Oxfordshire municipality has historically been dealt with.

As other places have grown new divisions have been created **within** the existing or expanded boundary so that Bicester, Carterton, Didcot, Kidlington, and Witney have split expanded populations into new electoral divisions using North, South, East, and West nomenclature whilst Abingdon, Banbury and Oxford City have used named areas within their boundaries. These solutions give each town and City greater representation at the County proportionate with the growing population.

Only in Wantage has the decision been taken that when the population grows, part of the electorate, i.e., Charlton, should be placed outside of the town boundary making Wantage representation disproportionately reduced for its size.

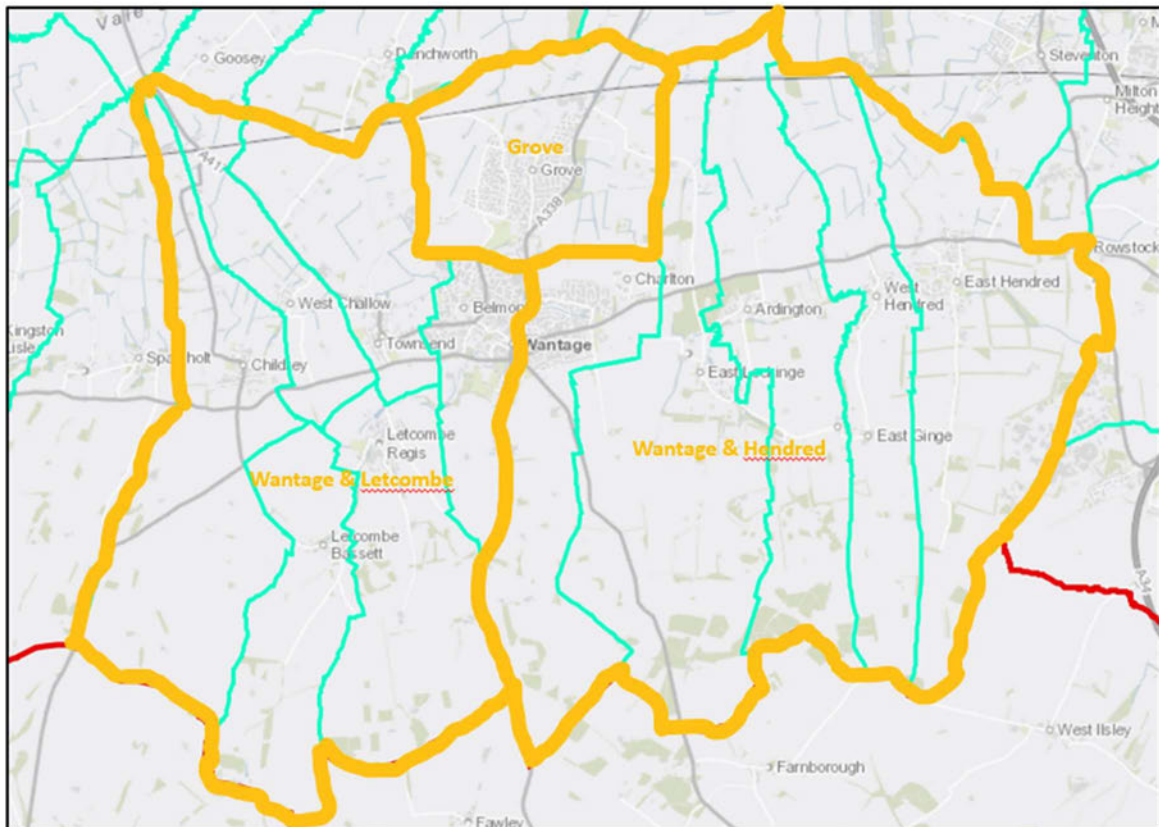
¹ Oxfordshire Electoral Forecasting Proforma

Moving Charlton to a new division unconnected to Wantage would effectively disenfranchise its population from services and infrastructure they will continue to use within the town, and which would be in a different division.

Wantage Charlton when taken with Wantage Segsbury (but not Grove Bridge), is predicted to increase its electorate from 10,221 in 2023 to 11,619 in 2029 an increase of 13.7%.

Clearly expanding Wantage division to reflect local places where the population rely upon services in Wantage would make more sense. For example, Wantage divisions could include East and West Challow, Childrey, Letcombe Bassett, Letcombe Regis, Lockinge, Ardington, and East and West Hendred, included along existing parish boundaries which would recognise the inevitable growth axis of Wantage, be coterminous and provide a sufficient electorate to warrant two County Council representatives for Wantage.

The three divisions would then look something like this map.



I suspect that the views of locals and Wantage Town Council have NOT been canvassed and would respectfully recommend an independent visit to Charlton to better understand the location and community, before reaching a final decision.

Yours faithfully

[Redacted Signature]