

The Lee Parish Council

Response to Boundary Commission Review of Buckinghamshire

Background

The Lee is a small rural parish, which currently sits within the Chiltern Ridges ward of Buckinghamshire Council. This ward, amounting to approximately 10,000 residents, was created with the inception of the unitary authority, and encompasses:

- the rural parishes of The Lee, Chartridge and Cholesbury-cum-St-Leonards
- the villages of Hyde End, South Heath and Ballinger, which are part of the parish of Great Missenden
- the village of Hyde Heath which is part of the parish of Little Missenden
- part of Chesham, a town of just under 30,000 inhabitants

The ward is currently represented by three councillors from two different political parties of whom:

- one previously represented Cholesbury, The Lee & Bellingdon on Buckinghamshire County Council
- one previously represented Chesham on Chiltern District Council, and is also a Chesham Town councillor
- one had previously served only as a town councillor, and remains a town councillor for Chesham

The Lee Parish Council (TLPC) has identified a number of flaws in the current arrangements:

- Having three councillors makes it very unclear who is responsible for what, with no clear division based on either geography or area of interest. We therefore tend to escalate all issues to all councillors, with no clear lines of responsibility or accountability.
- The rural parishes have a very different demographic to Chesham, and very different problems and priorities. With a small number of electors, few pavements, no streetlights and minimal public transport, we find that many of Chesham's priorities are irrelevant to us.
- Two of our three elected county councillors hold additional positions on Chesham Town Council which, despite best intentions, means their loyalties are not primarily with the rural villages; some councillors clearly have a greater interest in and understanding of the rural parishes than others.
- The Lee falls within the remit of the Chesham & Rural Villages Community Board, which does not have the same boundaries as the electoral ward. In particular:
 - The Community Board encompasses the electoral wards of Chesham, Chiltern Ridges and Chess Valley.
 - Ballinger, South Heath, Hyde End and Hyde Heath are part of the electoral ward, but fall under the remit of the Missendens Community Board

The Community Board structure means there will always be Bucks councillors from multiple wards attending the Board meetings, but currently some of those councillors need to attend multiple Community Board meetings.

Considerations

TLPC considered a number of factors in formulating its response. In no particular order these are:

Schools: The majority of children in Ballinger, South Heath and The Lee start their education at Lee Common First School (infants), before moving on to Great Missenden Middle School (juniors). Secondary education is primarily in Great Missenden or Chesham, with some children travelling to Amersham, Little Chalfont and Aylesbury.

Shopping: Most people visit the larger supermarkets in Chesham or Amersham, and possibly Berkhamsted and Aylesbury. More local shopping is in Great Missenden and Wendover.

Doctor: Mainly Great Missenden, but also Wendover and Chesham.

Post Office / Royal Mail: Served by Gt Missenden.

Leisure centres: mainly Chesham and Amersham.

Local groups and societies: Many groups and societies are shared with Ballinger – for example the local scout group is in Lee Common whilst the local Guides group (before it closed) was in Ballinger. A number of Ballinger residents attend church in The Lee, use the two pubs in The Lee and several also work in The Lee's community shop.

Parks: Small playground and football pitch within the village, otherwise Chesham, Amersham, Wendover and Great Missenden

Sport: Single public tennis court within the village, otherwise nearest club is Great Missenden. Cricket teams within the village and in Ballinger. Nearest golf club in Chartridge.

Fire Station: Gt Missenden.

Police: Chesham (part time) and Amersham.

Major issues: We, in common with Great Missenden and Wendover, are suffering severely from HS2.

Rural issues: Shared with rural communities such as Cholesbury and parts of Great Missenden

Travel: The Chiltern railway line is a key route (via Great Missenden and Amersham) as is the Metropolitan Line from Chesham and Amersham.

Natural boundaries: The A413 is not a boundary, rather it is a key route in and out of the parish; notwithstanding this, there is a definite affinity between the hilltop villages on the north side of the A413. The HS2 line is becoming a 'boundary' but will hopefully always be easy to cross.

Conclusions

The Lee would very much prefer to be grouped together in an electoral ward with similar rural parishes, served by a single, accountable, county councillor. We specifically do not wish to be grouped with Chesham, with which we have no boundary, as our relatively small number of residents and their needs are drowned out by the sheer number and different needs of those in Chesham.

We have a natural affinity and many shared activities with South Heath and Ballinger to the south, and a similar demographic and environment to Cholesbury-cum-St-Leonards to the north and parts of Chartridge to the east.

The 2011 census showed that the electoral ward of Cholesbury, The Lee & Bellingdon had a population of 2,304, whilst that of Ballinger, South Heath & Chartridge was 2,203.

A new ward incorporating:

- The Lee Parish
- Chartridge parish (which includes Bellingdon)
- Cholesbury-cum-St-Leonards parish
- The villages of South Heath and Ballinger from Great Missenden parish

would meet our goals of being grouped together with parishes with a similar demographic, profile and identity plus villages with whom we have many shared interests. It would more closely resemble the historic wards under Buckinghamshire County Council rather than the current artificial grouping, and would almost exactly (based on 2011 figures) meet the target of 4500 residents for each new council ward.

If the Commission's Review concludes that Chartridge and Cholesbury parishes should continue to be in wards associated with Chesham, then The Lee Parish would prefer simply to be added to a ward associated with Great Missenden villages.

Whilst it is not part of this consultation, we would very much hope that Buckinghamshire Council would take the opportunity to restructure the Community Boards, to ensure that no electoral ward is split across Board areas and that the Boards more accurately represent all residents in their area.