

Wychavon District Council

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Comment text:

Please see attached response to the draft proposals. Please note that, although I am a member of both Evesham Town Council and Wychavon District Council, these comments reflect my personal opinion and not necessarily those of either authority.

Uploaded Documents:

Download (https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/download_document?file=draft%2F1647617063_LGBCE+-+response+to+draft+proposals.docx)

Response to draft ward proposals for Wychavon District Council

As previously, this response does not cover the full district. It is primarily focussed on the proposed wards in and around Evesham.

I support the proposal to extend the boundary of Bengeworth ward to the north east, to incorporate the remainder of The Orchards and The Parks. Similarly, I support the proposal to make the River Avon the boundary between Evesham North and other wards.

The extension of the proposed The Hamptons ward along Fairfield Road creates awkward borders where the boundary runs between neighbouring houses on the same street. Although this area is, historically, the core of what was Little Hampton, the current community identity of the area is shared by the entire Fairfield Road/Four Pools Road developments. Fairfield Road and Four Pools Road together form the spine of this community, and this is much more important to residents now than the historic boundary. Dividing it between two different wards splits this community unnaturally. I would prefer the borders to be drawn so as to include the entire Fairfield/Four Pools community in the same ward.

On the other hand, the Thistledown estate, despite being included in your proposed Evesham South ward, only has road access via Cheltenham Road. Including it with Evesham South, therefore, breaks the principle that all parts of a ward should be accessible from each other by road without leaving the ward. Your report accompanying the draft proposals states that the Charity Brook area has better access to the remainder of Evesham South than to The Hamptons. However, this is not the case in Thistledown, for which the reverse is true.

It seems to me that both of these issues could be resolved by including the whole of Fairfield Road, and the streets off it, in the proposed Evesham South Ward, and including the Thistledown estate (and the stretch of Cheltenham Road from the northerly entrance of Thistledown to the A46) in the proposed The Hamptons ward. These two changes should broadly balance, meaning that the electorate numbers remain within the constraints. This would also avoid the need to create the "Hospital" town council ward, which would otherwise be an outlier in terms of its small size. The new town council ward created in this area by the district level changes would be more suitable. I would suggest that the name of this new town council ward should be "Fairfield".

Recommendations: Include the whole of Fairfield Road and its side streets in the Evesham South ward area, and transfer the Thistledown estate to the proposed Hamptons ward area. The resulting new town council ward should be named "Fairfield".

The proposed inclusion of Workman Gardens in the Evesham South ward area seems a little pointless, especially given that it contains no residential properties. Workman Gardens is, historically, a part of Bengeworth, and should be included in Bengeworth ward. I would suggest either retaining the existing boundary here, even though it splits the gardens, or extending Bengeworth ward southwest slightly along the riverbank as far as Battleton Brook. Given that neither option has any effect on electorate numbers, this would be a completely neutral change.

Recommendation: Include either the whole of Workman Gardens in Bengeworth ward, or leave the boundary at that point unchanged.

Enlarging Evesham South ward to comprise three members seems considerably less than ideal, especially given that you acknowledge in your technical guidance that larger wards result in a dilution of accountability to the electorate. While your guidance states that you only consider benefits to electors rather than to political organisations, it must be borne in mind that larger wards offer considerable electoral and administrative benefits to the dominant party in that ward. This is particularly the case when it comes to canvassing and leafletting at elections, where a larger party putting up a full slate of candidates will have three candidates to share the workload while an independent candidate, or sole candidate from a smaller party, will need to cover the entire ward on their own. In practice, that makes it unlikely that the electorate will receive equal communication from the parties, thus reducing their opportunity to make an informed choice.

While I appreciate that the area covered by the proposed Evesham South ward does, for the most part, represent an identifiable community (and especially if the Fairfield area is included within it), it seems to me to be too large to form a cohesive unit. I would prefer the area to be split between two wards, one of two members and one single member ward. Unfortunately, I don't have the data necessary to be able to do a detailed analysis of electorate numbers, but within the Evesham South area there are a number of natural boundaries, including Battleton Brook, the schools and the green spaces, which should allow a division of the area into two wards without creating too many artificial boundaries.

Recommendation: Split the proposed Evesham South ward into two wards, one of two members and one of one member.

Mark Goodge

Mark 2022