

North Hertfordshire District Council

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Comment text:

I am the North Herts District Councillor for Arbury ward and a resident of Bygrave. The LGBCE draft proposal to merge the two rural wards of Arbury and Weston & Sandon and include all the new development north of Baldock (allocated site BA1 in the Local Plan) fails to satisfy the Commission's own view that "a good pattern of wards should ... reflect community interests and identities and include evidence of community links". This is important because the principle of development on BA1 is predicated upon the premise that the new housing will "belong" to Baldock, not form a self-sufficient community outside the town and certainly not relate to Lower Bygrave village in terms of identity. The new residents will share an identity with the larger urban community of Baldock and not the villages in the rural areas around it. The Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan makes this a clear objective, and conversations with the strategy team at the Local Planning Authority confirm the intention that the development on BA1 should be an integral part of Baldock. Therefore the 1400 homes allocated on BA1 by 2030 and the additional 1400 thereafter would represent a discordant addition to the rural Arbury ward and should naturally be represented by a councillor in a Baldock ward. In the longer term it may be desirable to move the Bygrave parish boundary back so that the new development is no longer contained within it. In the meantime, there are easily enough electors already in that area to justify a parish ward member, if that is really the Commission's only objection to the proposal by North Herts Council. I therefore object to the Commission's proposal for a new Ashwell and Weston ward and support the position of North Herts Council, namely: The Council objects to the LGBCE's decisions regarding Baldock and the proposed Ashwell & Weston ward. a. The developments outside of Baldock are an extension of the urban area and will be strikingly different in character and demographic from the very rural areas of Bygrave. The Council considers that there is no way that the development to the east of Baldock could be considered similar in nature or outlook to the rest of Bygrave. The issues residents will face will be different, and the community interests and identities will look to Baldock, not the rural areas of the parish of Bygrave. Bygrave currently has around 200 electors; the new development will contain around 1,400 electors by 2028 – vastly outnumbering the rest of Bygrave parish. b. The proposed large ward would lead to a failure in representation of urban residents, who would be separated from their community in Baldock. It would also fail rural residents as the population of the new ward would be concentrated in the new developments of Baldock, in areas of Bygrave & Clothall parishes. As a result, the ward will be dominated by residents who will identify as being from Baldock and are serviced by Baldock's schools, shops, pubs and transport links. c. The proposed Ashwell & Weston ward is too large to be effective and convenient, with 11 separate parish areas to represent. There is, as the LGBCE notes, a single road that crosses the busy A505 dual carriageway – a junction with no lighting in which a narrow minor road crosses four lanes of traffic and a central reservation. Given the necessity for District Councillors to attend parish councils, meetings and events, many of which take place in the evenings, the proposed warding would require Councillors to potentially travel the length and breadth of a large rural ward on multiple occasions each week. d. Current Councillors report that their wards, with up to 7 parish areas, can already be hard work to manage and consider that increasing this to 11 would be unviable and lead to worse representation for local communities. e. In addition, a similar arrangement was put in place some years ago near Great Ashby, in which the new urban development was included with rural communities. That arrangement was ineffective and was resolved by creating a separate parish of Great Ashby. The Council suggests that, given it was ineffective then, it is unlikely to be a satisfactory resolution now. f. The LGBCE also says that the alternative proposed by the Council is not feasible since it would involve the creation of parish wards that would have an insufficient electorate in 2024. In fact this is not the case. The population of the potential "Baldock Ward" of Bygrave Parish is currently 16% of the total population of Bygrave parish would allow a Parish Council of five to have four members from a Bygrave Ward and

one from a Baldock Ward. It is the Council's view that the challenge of having small parish wards should be navigated, not accommodated, and the goal of achieving good governance in parishes should not diminish good governance at district level. g. As acknowledged in the LGBCE's proposals, the cross-party consensus represented in the North Herts Council's initial proposal reflected this reality and we would encourage persistence in seeking arrangements that support this. h. Creation of a ward in Clothall Parish would not be necessary since there is no Parish Council in Clothall. i. The proposed arrangements are much less satisfactory from a community representation point of view and no better from the perspective of electoral equality. Therefore, the Council considers that the approach proposed previously by the Council should be adopted rather than that recommended by the Commission. j. The Council also proposes that, should the LGBCE revert to current warding arrangements in this area, the ward should retain the name Arbury rather than be named after any specific villages.

Uploaded Documents:

None Uploaded