

Walsall

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Comment text:

Please see attached my second submission to this consultation, in response to your draft proposals. This time I would like to submit my views more widely as I have had the opportunity to examine what you have put forward.

Attached Documents:

- cllr-hicken-consultation-2.docx

Second response to the Local Government Boundary Review – Walsall

I would like to thank the Commission for taking into account my last submission to the boundary review for New Invention. My proposal of changing the ward name from Willenhall North to New Invention has sparked some interesting conversations, but I am still eager to hear what residents think the ward name should be.

As I can now consider the draft proposals that have been put forward by the commission, I would like to thank you for keeping the New Invention ward boundaries as they currently exist in your draft proposal.

In my second submission I would like to give my views on your draft proposals for the whole of the Walsall borough. Whilst I have lived most of my life in the New Invention area, I have for a time also lived elsewhere in the Walsall borough. I also have family connections across the borough, which I believe gives me an insight that may be useful to you.

Bloxwich proposals

Most of my family were originally from the Bloxwich area, and many still do continue to live in the vicinity of Bloxwich.

Whilst I understand that you are required to make up a shortfall in electoral numbers in Bloxwich East, I was surprised to see the changes that you have put forward.

The area of Irvine Road and Odell Road continues to be challenging. This area has struggled to associate itself with Bloxwich East, and I fear that it will struggle to do so under your proposals to move it into Bloxwich West. May I suggest that you consider moving Irvine Road and surrounding streets into the Birchills-Leamore ward? The Leamore area is well known and significant locally, and yet remains fragmented between different wards. Moving this area into the Birchills-Leamore ward would unite more of the Leamore area together under one set of representatives.

I am also surprised that your forecasted electoral numbers for the Bloxwich East ward do not reflect the amount of discussion and potential development for this area. It is my understanding that the Bloxwich East ward may be considerably further developed in the next few years, and this unfortunately does not seem to be reflected in the data you have been given by the local authority. My concern is that this will cause the Bloxwich East ward to have a significantly higher number of electors than has been forecast.

Birchills-Leamore proposals

In your draft proposal you have removed a large amount of the Birchills area but have decided to keep the ward name the same. This would be unsuitable if your proposals were to go ahead, and I would therefore suggest either changing the ward name, or ideally, move the Birchills area back into the Birchills-Leamore ward.

I would also suggest that the area of Birchills currently in the Pleck ward is moved into the Birchills-Leamore ward. This is a similar situation to Leamore, with the Birchills area divided between three different wards. It would make sense to have the Birchills community represented by the same representatives rather than being confusingly fragmented.

I note that Councillor Jukes suggested that you include Beechdale into the ward name but you rejected this. May I suggest that you consider this once again? The Beechdale area is quite substantial and has a strong local identity. I live on this estate currently and had family living here not too long ago. I believe that it would be a benefit if the ward name reflected this area and would be welcomed by local residents who are rightfully proud of where they live.

Blakenall proposal

I lived for several years in the area between the Birchills and North Walsall areas. It would seem to me that these areas should ideally be represented under the same ward. The area to the south of Proffitt Street to Littleton Street West would ideally come under the same ward as the Birchills area. This would also bridge the Blue Lane East, to top of Green Lane and Bloxwich Road areas of your proposed St Matthews ward. Whilst this may appear to be quite radical compared to your draft proposals, this area does share a large community. It would make more sense for this area from Proffitt Street to the Birchills to be represented by one ward.

St Matthews proposal

There are two main problems with the draft proposal that has been put forward, which may have been missed during your recent visit to the area.

The first, is that the Walsall Ring Road (A454 and A4148) is a significant barrier for communities. The heavy traffic flow along these roads, even late into the evenings and on weekends, means that there is very little connection between communities on opposite sides of the ring road. This presents the two issues with the draft proposal as it is set out.

The first is that in your proposal the area of Birchills is now divided amongst three different wards, with the section of the Ring Road (Wolverhampton Road and Blue Lane West) being a very challenging boundary which separates communities.

The Birchills-Leamore ward also includes an area called Reedswood, which is the area from Bentley Lane to Reedswood Way, and this is a community in its own right.

Although unintentional, your draft proposal separates not only the Birchills community, but also creates a potential issue with Reedswood as well. I would suggest that this area of your proposed Pleck ward is moved in its entirety to the Birchills-Leamore ward. This would unite these communities under a single set of representatives, which I believe would have strong local support and make it much clearer to residents who represents them.

As outlined in my Blakenall comments, I would also suggest that you move the area from Green Lane (A34) from the proposed St Matthews ward to either the Birchills-Leamore (ideally) or Blakenall wards. I used to live in Blue Lane East, which is located near Stafford Street, and I believe that these communities would be best represented by either Birchills-Leamore or Blakenall representatives. This would also stop the Ring Road from impacting on how these communities connect and are therefore represented as well.

The second issue I see with your draft proposal is the moving of the Chuckery area into the Paddock ward. For the same reasons as set out above, the A4148 creates a barrier which separates these two communities. The Chuckery area has had good representation from being part of the same ward as Walsall Town Centre, and I fail to see why this should not continue. The good walking routes from the Chuckery to the town centre means that there is a lot of movement between these two communities.