

Swindon

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Organisation Name: Penhill Forum (Representative of a local organisation)

Comment text:

Related subject: Penhill

At the August 2024 Penhill Forum, we discussed the plans to combine us with Pinehurst and part of Gorse Hill into one ward with two ward councillors.

We object to this plan, we do not want to be joined with Pinehurst/Gorse Hill.

Present at the Forum were 9 representatives, who live in Penhill and speak for 14 Penhill Groups/activities and one Church Rep/educator who lives in Pinehurst, all long-term volunteers. A discussion took place which also included one Parish councillor and one SBC councillor, a worker from our local Voluntary Action and a worker from the Central North Swindon Parish. They not excluded from the discussion.

The Maps and comments sent to us were shared in advance with the invitation to the meeting and further, shown and read aloud at the meeting. All confirmed they had received the invitation with documents attached before the meeting. It was agreed that the discussion should be first on the agenda to ensure people would not be 'meeting weary'.

We ensured that the local people present were the ones making comments although the others joined in. The conclusion of the discussion was that we strongly object to having one Ward for 'Pinehurst and Penhill' feeling, based upon experience, that it would help neither community, but would particularly be, not to our benefit.

Although Penhill and Pinehurst are similar in status (areas of deprivation), it would mean that any funding coming to those areas in the future would be either spread too thinly to make much difference or we would not benefit from it at all. That anything gained would be centred on the Pinehurst Community Centre in Pinehurst. Although the two estates are in easy walking distance for the able bodied and close enough by car, there is no direct bus, (in fact no joined up bus route between the two communities) anywhere close, and no proper dropped kerbs etc.

We have over a period of years had only two SBC Cllrs, only one of which we see/hear from regularly. Having only 2 Cllrs for so large an area,

with extra problems via the deprivation and large amounts of council housing in both areas, would mean little/late help and how would they know what the community at large feels about any plans? This would leave us in a very under-represented state, especially as now the only way we can respond is on-line.

We also note a serious lack of understanding about these issues, with no apparent opportunities to move forward. The map provided was difficult to read and small, it was as well that a few present were very familiar with those boundaries.

Then the question was asked where should we be otherwise linked? Historically the land upon which Penhill is built was in Stratton Parish.

Boundary Commission insisted that these new boundary changes should mean that our wards should be within the same boundary as the Parish we have been placed within. We remembered that we did not get much choice about that at the time. We came to no conclusion about the Parish except we would rather not be in CNSP, it has not been a happy change for us. We also discussed that usually the boundaries do not cross old barriers, i.e busy Roads, we are separated on two sides by very busy A roads and in other areas by very historic boundaries, recent changes have ignored these and this plan also does that.

We felt that as the Commission had visited the estates, it would have been good for local people to be invited to attend that. You will appreciate that this is of great importance to the people that live here, some notice should be taken of those that live and work here. All of our councillors live elsewhere. We are under-represented now and this move will make it worse.

We are also aware and feel that the Boundary Commission should know that, that being in Parish and Borough wards, means two sets of Cllrs, and often these are the same people, often man and wife, who can vote for their own choice on each council, limiting our 'say' (and democracy) even further.

Marilyn Beale, Secretary, Penhill Forum.

Attached Documents:

None attached