Milton Keynes City Council Conservative Group

**Response to Draft Recommendations for New Ward Boundaries in Milton Keynes.**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the ward boundary proposals for Milton Keynes. This response is on behalf of the Conservative Group on Milton Keynes City Council and the Milton Keynes Conservatives.

We were surprised by the initial consultations. The variance of population figures for wards was significant, leading to inequalities in the allocation of electorate between elected members. There were better proposals that gave a more equitable distribution of electorate to elected members.

Below, we have suggested some changes that will both make the wards more equitable but also re-join the community links that have been fractured by the draft recommendations.

Change 1

Initially, we would suggest moving Peartree Bridge polling district from the proposed Ouzel Valley ward into the proposed Woughton & Fishermead ward and moving Woolstone from the proposed Campbell Park and Willen ward into the proposed Ouzel Valley ward.

Numerically, these changes bring Woughton and Fishermead closer to the average, make little change to Ouzel Valley ward but bring Campbell Park and Willen ward closer to the average.

There are also a number of community link reasons why our proposals would improve the draft recommendation:

* Woolstone has been a historic neighbour to Woughton on the Green for centuries. They both sit on the historic road from Newport Pagnell to Bletchley. At the last ward boundary review, which took effect in 2014, similar reasons were given in the consultation stage which went on to completely change the proposals. They are similar historic communities with similar amounts of historic architecture.
* Peartree Bridge has little in common with Woughton on the Green, the communities are separated from that ward by a canal and only has a tenuous road link. It faces and links far better with Woughton and Fishermead.

These changes, in our view, either improve or make little difference to the electorate numbers and don’t fracture historic links that exist between very similar communities.

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| **Ward** | **Draft Recommendation- Electorate Figure** | **Revised Electorate Figure with our proposed revisions** |
| Woughton & Fishermead | 10, 603 | 11, 353 |
| Ouzel Valley | 10, 552 | 10, 436 |
| Campbell Park & Willen | 11, 446 | 10,812 |

Change 2

The rural areas prove difficult in this proposal and any proposal with the electorate figures that we are having to work with. There will be one rural ward and one that will have to cover both rural and urban areas. The proposed arrangements are however not equitable and therefore could be changed to make them more equitable in our opinion.

We propose to move Stoke Goldington and Gayhurst back into the proposed Hanslope and New Bradwell ward. This change will increase the electorate figure of Hanslope and New Bradwell, which is currently very low, and lower the Olney Ward.

Other reasons for this proposed change:

* Number of Parish Councils

The Current Olney ward covers a distinct group of small rural parishes. Milton Keynes has circa 47 parishes and currently, 17 of those are in the Olney ward.

While this may seem irrelevant, all bar one of these parishes do not have a full-time parish clerk or full-time staff to help run the parish thus ward councillors must provide significant support to the functioning of these councils.

In comparison, many councillors elsewhere in Milton Keynes only have one or two parishes in their wards, often with full-time professional clerks, thus they need not be as involved in the running of their parish councils.

Alongside this support, attendance at parish council meetings is an important part of a ward councillors’ role in their community. If Olney ward is increased to 18 or potentially 19 parishes, this would make this responsibility increasingly difficult especially as councillors in this area already often have three or four parish meetings in one evening. Thus, the draft recommendation for Olney ward makes this situation worse and risks ward councillors’ ability to take active roles in all their parish councils.

Our proposed changes to Olney Ward recognise that supporting parishes is a vital part of the role for a councillor in the rural areas and seek to level this work out more fairly between Olney ward and Hanslope & New Bradwell ward. Numerically, the proposed changes lower the electorate figure, but it remains not the smallest ward and will still be one of the hardest wards to work, even with a lower electorate.

* Moulsoe Village

Moulsoe Village have requested to stay in the Olney Ward. The consultation guidelines suggest this might be possible if a road link can be established. The parish of Moulsoe has a road link to Olney and this has not changed within the current proposals. The parish and some of the historic homes of the parish face onto the road from North Crawley to Newport Pagnell therefore we believe that meets that part of the criteria.

Naming of Olney Ward

We believe the decision to reuse ‘Olney’ within the ward title is strange, considering the proposed Olney ward contains potentially between 16 and 19 parishes, one of which is named Olney. Moreover, many of these parishes do not look to Olney as the town that serves their residents. Many villages, such as Astwood, Hardmead, North Crawley, Chichley, Sherington and Moulsoe, look to Newport Pagnell for their schools, doctors’ surgeries and key services.

We propose that “Ouse Valley ward” is a more appropriate name as all parishes are within the Ouse Valley. We recognise that this may cause confusion with the proposed Ouzel Valley Ward and thus suggest this ward is renamed in line with a significant area in the ward, possibly “Woolstone” if the above changes are accepted.

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| **Ward** | **Draft Recommendation- Electorate Figure** | **Revised Electorate Figure with our proposed revisions** |
| Hanslope & New Bradwell | 10, 169 | 10, 714 |
| Olney | 10, 607 | 10,062 |
| *Olney + Moulsoe Village* | *We estimate Moulsoe village to be around 220 electors* | *10, 282* |

**To conclude,** we believe our proposed changes produce more equitable wards, both numerically and in terms of work for ward councillors, as well as seeking to maintain historic community links.