

CODDINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NEWARK AND SHERWOOD: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. In the 1st period of consultation for this electoral review the 3 constituent parishes of Winthorpe Ward (Barnby in the Willows, Coddington and Winthorpe) submitted a joint representation regarding Newark and Sherwood District Council's proposed disbandment of the ward and the disestablishment of its single district councillor. For this consultation, with the Commission's different recommendations, although retaining the loss of the councillor, the 3 parishes will respond separately.
2. Coddington Parish Council (the 'Council') regrets that the change of envisaged ward alliance from Fernwood to Balderton North has not improved the position for our community. The proposed re-arrangement of boundaries still results in the combining of settlements that have no relationships or affinity with each other. While acknowledging the need for change, the Council considers that overall, the balancing of the 'statutory' criteria remains disproportionate and will seek to demonstrate how this might be resolved whilst maintaining a strong electoral equality.

ELECTORAL EQUALITY

3. The Council acknowledges the clear evidence that by 2019, after new residential development, the recommended Balderton North & Coddington (East) Ward will achieve an acceptable level of electoral equality within the District. However Coddington will remain a proverbial small tail some way behind a large dog, just 23% of the ward's projected electorate. We do feel this to be the "numbers" game having absolute primacy; Coddington, and Barnby-in-the-Willows, only merit passing reference in the 2nd sentence of your para 46.

EFFECTIVE AND CONVENIENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

4. The Council notes your comments regarding small parish enclaves in paras 42 and 45. We are disappointed, however, that in para 42 the A1 is considered to be a "*strong barrier*" whilst in para 45, there is no similar perception. On the ground, communication between Beacon Hill and Coddington is direct and efficient, via the C208, whilst that between Coddington and Balderton relies on a narrow minor road through a stretch of open countryside. The proposed linkage of the latter communities does appear to rely on a geographical contrivance rather than any tangible commonality. Moreover, we contest the further statement in para 42, with regard to Beacon Heights, that the A1 [as a barrier],... "*reflects the community in this part of the district*" and will discuss that aspect below, in paras 6 – 10.
5. The Commission's technical guidance on electoral review (para 5.25) notes the difficulty of defining "*effective and convenient local government*", with para 5.26 suggesting reasonable road links. We believe that other factors might also be considered. Our present Winthorpe Ward comprises 3 rural parishes which have strong links geographically and environmentally, and in terms of interests, social and sporting activities. Whilst Coddington and Balderton are both, by definition, villages with Parish Councils, Balderton is now, in reality, an urban extension of Newark. Although both parishes are strongly independent, their concerns and activities are different; linking the two would not be a match. Currently Coddington is part of a single-councillor ward; irrespective of any political party considerations, our representative has been accountable to each of the constituent parishes and a valued protagonist for us. We seem unable to avoid a multi-councillor ward, but given the lack of coherence between Balderton and Coddington in

financial and community terms, we would become a minor partner; so much so that we do not see this union as democratic.

LOCAL COMMUNITY IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS

6. We have already stated our belief that electoral equality has been given undue weight. Furthermore, status as parish councils aside, the Council has struggled to identify any meaningful broad common ground with Balderton (North) in terms of community identity and interests; it doesn't exist. We consider, however, despite the statement in your para 42 that the A1 "*presents a strong barrier*", that Coddington (East Ward) has considerable commonality with Beacon Heights (Polling Districts AAAA2 (Beacon Ward) and AAAA4 (Coddington-West Ward)). These ties become increasingly strong proceeding eastwards from the crest of Beacon Hill Road; that point, the start of the Beacon Heights plateau, itself constitutes a boundary, with the settlement being increasingly "urban-lite", contrasting with the characteristics of the remainder of the Beacon ward, to the west. The first notable link is that Beacon Heights shares a polling station with Coddington at the Coddington Community Centre, for all elections. Previously, for many years before 2008, the shared polling station was Coddington Village Hall. This common usage is no accident but reflects convenience and ease of access, over the A1, via the C208 (former A17) which consists of Beacon Hill and Beckingham Roads.

7. **Communications.** The C208, in a similar manner to London Road which connects communities between Balderton and Newark town centre, links communities leading eastwards from Newark to the A17, beyond Coddington. Such was the level of pedestrian and cycle traffic that with the construction of the Newbury Road estate on Beacon Heights, the roadside footway leading from there to Coddington was enhanced to form a proper cycle/pedestrian path, which is extremely well used; it is the sole direct route to the Community Centre and school from Beacon Heights. The C208 is the route for the local bus service shared by Beacon Heights and Coddington. The two communities also share an interest in road safety and traffic management along the C208; this will be an increasingly joint burden with new residential sites feeding into the route by 2019.

8. **Church Activities.** All Saints' Church Coddington forms part of the Anglican Newark Team Ministry. The Ministry, which includes the Newark parish church and one other church, encompasses Coddington and Beacon Heights as well as the central and north-east sectors of the town. In addition to services, All Saints' Church runs secular support activities, across the age-groups at the Community Centre. Coddington's vicar, a Beacon Heights resident, assesses the proportion of participation in the church's activities from Beacon Heights at around 55-60% of the total. Proportions of that order will feature regularly in our comparisons between Beacon Heights and Coddington.

9. **Coddington Primary School.** The Council has noted your comments of 6 November concerning school catchment areas, but we do feel that school activities are a catalyst for community involvement on a broader scale. The breakdown of the latest pupil figures to hand shows 54% - Beacon Ward, 36% - Winthorpe Ward and 0.45% - Balderton North. We do not foresee a significant change to the proportions; both areas have a substantial housing stock of types attractive to younger families, combined with a steady turnover in ownership. These proportions generate both communal activities (youth and social), and common concerns with parking issues and road safety, and pedestrian route issues, between Coddington and Beacon Heights.

10. **Social and Communal Activities.** We have approached a number of organisations to ascertain the proportional involvement of the Beacon Heights and Coddington communities. The results are relatively consistent, and reflect the fact that Coddington is the sole provider of communal facilities for both localities:

a. **Coddington Post Office.** Although there is a newsagent/shop on Beacon Heights (Blatherwick Road), the sub-post office and newsagent/convenience store in Coddington is a focal point for both communities. The proprietors assess the ratios of customers for both the post office and general business as being 50% each from Beacon Heights residents and from Coddington/Barnby/Beckingham residents.

- b. **Coddington Community Centre.** Comparisons are more difficult as the Centre, in common with others in the Newark area, competes to attract users, with a consequent mix of both one-off and regular customers, including commercial ventures, from a larger area. The Trustees estimate that Beacon Heights utilisation amounts to some 35% , with Coddington at 40%.
- c. **Scouts, Cubs etc.** Operating at their own building in Coddington, the membership division between the two communities is about 50-50.
- d. **Guides, Brownies etc.** Using the Community Centre, membership of the various groups is weighted 60-40 in favour of Beacon Heights.
- e. **Womens' Institute.** For several reasons the proportion of Beacon Heights members is just 25%. The Coddington WI enjoys a solid reputation and attracts members from further afield. Similarly, the membership includes a number who have moved from Coddington but continue their association.
- f. **Communal Activities.** An overview includes the annual Carols Around the Tree at the Community Centre, special celebrations eg the Royal Wedding and the Coronation Anniversary, Primary School events, and regular fund-raising activities for the Community Centre, Scout Hall, Village Hall and Church roof. These are all supported in equal measure by residents of both communities.

ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

11. In the light of our comments above, we respectfully suggest that a viable alternative exists, which will maintain electoral equality, but redress considerably the lack of coherency in the draft recommendations. Simply, we suggest that the inclusion of Coddington East within the Beacon Ward be offset by the transfer of Polling District EEEE1 from Beacon Ward to join with Balderton North. As EEEE1 forms part of the potentially defunct Magnus Ward, it might be appropriate to have a fresh title "Balderton North and Magnus", thus preserving an old Newark name. The overall numerical impact in 2019 is negligible, whilst in 2013 terms, there would be an improvement of 2.5% to Beacon Ward's negative variance. We believe "Magnus", given its immediate proximity, would have far greater coherence with Balderton North. It would also share a common main traffic artery and bus services - London Road. From the Balderton District Councillors' viewpoint, the poor highway link with Coddington would be removed, along with the lack of commonality between the two separated sections of the Ward. In Beacon Ward, the absorption of Coddington would see a merger of communities with a broad spectrum of common interests, for the common good. We see this as a one-off opportunity to improve community cohesion and communication for both the electorate and their Councillors in both wards.

CONCLUSION

12. Coddington Parish Council contends that although the Commission's recommendations for the parish were strong on electoral equality there were significant failings in meeting the other statutory criteria. We have demonstrated that there is a substantial symmetry between Coddington and Beacon Ward which far outweighs any advantages of the Commission's recommendations. This symmetry redresses those failings without affecting electoral equality. We therefore submit that the Coddington East and EEEE1 polling districts be switched between their respective proposed wards to better meet the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Coddington Parish Council
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