

**EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 9 JANUARY 2013 at 7.30pm**

Present: Councillor C Cant – Chairman.
Councillors G Barker, S Barker, R Chambers, J Cheetham, J Davey, P Davies, A Dean, R Eastham, K Eden, I Evans, E Godwin, E Hicks, S Howell, D Jones, A Ketteridge, J Ketteridge, T Knight, M Lemon, K Mackman, J Menell, D Morson, E Oliver, E Parr, D Perry, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe, J Rose, D Sadler, L Smith, A Walters and L Wells.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer) and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

PRESENTATION BY SAFFRON WALDEN SKATE GROUP

The meeting was preceded by a presentation about entitled “One Minet Park – creating an exciting flexible space to inspire the whole community”. The Chairman thanked Linda Bush, Jane Clarke and members of the Saffron Walden BMX and skater community who had attended to deliver the presentation.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Prior to the meeting statements were made by Lord Anthony Vernon, Mrs Jeanette O’Brien and Mr Stewart Luck. A summary of those statements is appended to these minutes.

The Chairman thanked all speakers and said many Members felt sympathy with the last speaker’s views on change for change’s sake, but that “no change” was not an option.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Artus, D Crome, J Loughlin, J Rich and J Salmon.

Councillor Chambers declared his non-pecuniary interest as a member of Essex County Council and Essex Fire Authority.

Councillor S Barker declared her non-pecuniary interest as a member of Essex County Council.

FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW

The Chairman asked Members to refer to the additional papers which had been tabled. She invited the Chief Executive to introduce the report on the Further Electoral Review.

The Chief Executive gave a summary of the reasons for the requirement that the Council should undergo an electoral review. He explained the District met both the intervention criteria regarding electoral imbalance in a percentage of its wards.

The Chief Executive emphasised the fact that the Council was itself a consultee of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and therefore that it was the Boundary Commission, not the district Council, which was consulting parish councils and others. This review was not a review of parish boundaries. The Further Electoral Review required the Council to propose a new pattern of warding arrangements based on a new council size. This was a decision which the Council had already taken. The decision was that the total number of councillors would be 39. What Members now needed to do was to agree the number and boundaries of wards; the number of councillors to be elected for each ward; and the name of the wards.

The Chief Executive reminded Members of the earlier occasions when Members had had opportunities to consider the review. He referred to a workshop to which all members had been invited and listed the dates of all meetings of the Electoral Working Group and of Full Council at which the matter had been considered. He said the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager, Mr Snow, had also attended meetings of the political groups in order to assist full consideration of the review and the Council's proposals, as well as the minority scheme which had been put forward by the Liberal Democrat group.

The Chief Executive said it was important to keep in mind the three statutory criteria to which the proposals must have regard: the need to secure equality of representation; the need to reflect identities and interests of local communities; and the need to secure effective and convenient local government. Although these criteria should have equal weight, the Boundary Commission generally expected that any proposed scheme would seek to achieve as close to electoral equality as possible, so as to balance electorate figures at the start of the Review with the five year forecast. The aim should be to achieve the maximum amount of improvement towards electoral equality at the first election at which the revised scheme would come into effect, that is, 2015.

The Chief Executive said the Boundary Commission had carried out full consultation at all stages of the review, including directly with parish councils. He emphasised that consultation responses from parish councils should be sent directly to the Boundary Commission, and that Parish councils were not affected directly by the Further Electoral Review, except where there were proposals to divide parishes between wards. The consultation would close on 14 January 2013, after which the Boundary Commission would consider all proposals submitted, with draft recommendations being published in April. A further

consultation would then take place and final recommendations would be published in October.

The Chief Executive said the Democratic and Electoral Services Officer had carried out a great deal of work to a very high standard and was in attendance tonight in order to take technical questions. Finally, it should be noted that the Boundary Commission considered exemplar the Council's submission on council size and had referred other councils to it.

Councillor Chambers then introduced the proposed revised electoral scheme. He said the task of proposing new electoral arrangements was one of the most difficult challenges for a council, as it affected all members. He hoped Members took these proposals to be the right way forward, and in no respect were they to be taken personally. Members had before them a recommendation from the Electoral Working Group, but he now put forward a revised recommendation, as set out in the new papers tabled.

Councillor Chambers said the Electoral Working Group had met on several occasions; he hoped all Members had had input over the significant time during which this matter had been considered. Whatever proposal was submitted would not be perfect but he hoped Members would accept it as the right compromise.

Councillor Chambers referred to the fact that the Boundary Commission would undertake further consultation and that parish boundaries would not change. He said the revised scheme tried to take into account recent representations made, which he summarised. Regarding Henham and Elsenham, there had been a strong call to keep these communities within a single ward which was now proposed; regarding Debden and Wimbish, he now proposed that Debden Green should remain in that ward; regarding Thaxted, the ward would now include Tilty; regarding Takeley, he now proposed a three-member ward which included Broxted and Little Canfield, as well as Bush End. Regarding the inclusion of Bush End within Takeley, this arrangement was necessary to achieve electoral balance, but did not mean that the Bush End representative on the Parish Council would go to Takeley Parish Council, but would, as now, attend Hatfield Broad Oak Parish Council.

Councillor Chambers said it was necessary to make two comments regarding the revised scheme: Little Walden had very strong links with Saffron Walden Castle Ward, therefore the Council would ask the Boundary Commission if the village could be included in that ward for this reason. Secondly, a request to the Boundary Commission would be made to take into account Wicken Bonhunt's historically strong ties with Clavering. These were the only two anomalies the Council would be asking the Boundary Commission to look at.

Councillor Chambers proposed the Council's preferred option for a revised electoral scheme as set out at appendices G and H to the report, with the various associated maps to be submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Councillor Walters seconded the proposal.

Councillor Morson asked whether this proposal needed to be an amendment to the proposal in the agenda papers.

The Chairman said it was her understanding that this was now the substantive motion.

Councillor Dean expressed concern regarding the process by which the Council had come up with its proposal. He said the Council had on 17 April 2012 set out a timetable and that it had agreed that the Electoral Working Group would consider the matter and that a workshop would take place. Councillor Dean said the workshop had not happened and that in his opinion the working group had not done any work but had simply received draft proposals from Mr Snow.

Councillor Dean said he had suggested an alternative proposal to the Electoral Working Group, to which there had been a response from the Chief Executive that Mr Snow should assist him in working up his proposal. Councillor Dean said he had been concerned that this offer had prompted a comment by Councillor Chambers that no work should be done outside the Electoral Working Group. Councillor Dean said he regarded this comment to be an attempt to suppress meetings other than those of the working group. By contrast, there had been private meetings prior to tonight's meeting, following a two month interregnum in meetings of the Electoral Working Group. Councillor Dean said a revised proposal, appendix G, had been put forward in an attempt to devise a solution for the middle of the district. This included a proposal for Takeley to have three members. He concluded that nothing new had come forward from Members' meetings as the working group had done very little work, and it was for that reason there was now an eleventh hour proposal. Councillor Dean said the process had not worked properly, hence tonight's revised scheme.

Councillor Knight said she was delighted Debden Green was now proposed to be returned to its rightful place. She said Mr Snow had done a tremendous job, but she was concerned at the fact that the proposal had come forward only at the eleventh hour, but also concerned that the Boundary Commission might not accept this proposal. If that happened then there should be more open discussion and more information for parish councils. She said the scheme placed great emphasis on numbers, but there needed to be emphasis on community.

Councillor J Ketteridge said the Chief Executive had outlined all the meetings with which members had been involved and he did not agree with the points that Councillor Dean had made, as Members could have had as much involvement with the process as they wished. He recalled addressing members at the last Council meeting at which this matter had been considered, and inviting any Member who wished to do so to attend the next meeting of the Electoral Working Group. However, none had attended, apart from the opposition representative.

Councillor Ketteridge said these proposals had been before Members for a considerable time and there had been a briefing for Members given by the Boundary Commission. Mr Snow had been to meetings of both main political groups to explain the proposals. The proposal put forward endeavoured to

achieve a situation which would satisfy the Boundary Commission, which was a difficult challenge. He hoped what was proposed was a solution which would be accepted by the Commission together with the anomalies being put forward. Further consultation would take place once the Commission's final proposals were issued.

Councillor Godwin said unfortunately ill health had prevented her from attending the last Council meeting, as she would have sent representations to the Electoral Working Group had she known of the Leader's invitation to attend. She had been horrified to find that the proposals suggested Birchanger should move into Stansted. She understood where the working group was coming from but to make Birchanger part of a four-member town was not acceptable. She would be submitting a proposal for a ward which would acknowledge Birchanger in its own right, on the principle that a village should not be subsumed into a town.

Councillor Menell said the ward she represented was to be totally abolished. She was very disappointed that comments she had made had not been taken into account. However she acknowledged the difficulty of the task and the immense amount of work it had required of Mr Snow. Residents of Littlebury and Littlebury Green seemed not to have been considered and she was extremely sorry.

Councillor Rose said Mr Snow's hard work was much appreciated, but that Newport did not wish to be an anomaly. Newport would welcome into its ward Wicken Bonhunt, but he hoped the proposed numbers for growth in Newport would not be reflected in additional electorate figures. He did not want unsustainable building in Newport.

Councillor Eden supported the proposal, and congratulated Mr Snow. It was worthy of note that the Commission in the twenty-first century had not resorted to technology to accomplish far more readily what did not need to be such a complicated task. He said the Chief Executive should suggest that the Commission introduce technology to its work in conducting boundary reviews.

Councillor Eastham said he hoped the Commission would take into account wishes of Little Walden residents. He would support the revised scheme but he was concerned that the anomaly of Little Walden and Saffron Walden Castle ward should be dealt with in the correct manner, as there was no connection between Little Walden and Ashdon.

Councillor Cheetham said she supported the proposal. She was delighted to see that her representations and those of the parish councils she represented had been taken on board. Mr Snow and the Electoral Working Group should be praised, as boundary re-organisation was a difficult process and she recalled the last time such a review had taken place. She understood the disappointment of Councillors Godwin and Menell regarding the proposals for their wards, which was down to the numbers game. She agreed with Councillor Eastham that community cohesion should be highlighted with localism very strongly in asking for the anomalies to be considered.

Councillor Oliver said he too hoped the comments addressing the anomaly of Wicken Bonhunt would be made very strongly. Wicken Bonhunt had been part of Clavering for a long time and both villages shared amenities such as the school, shops and Church.

Councillor Hicks said as the representative for Barnston and High Easter his ward would disappear under the 39 Member scheme. As a member of the Electoral Working Group he had had the opportunity to look closely at the figures, and quite clearly Barnston and High Easter as a ward did not make any sense. The attachment of Barnston to Dunmow South and the relationship between High Easter and The Rodings seemed to make sense. He would support the proposals. They would not satisfy everyone but were as near as the Council could get to a manageable situation.

Councillor Dean said he wished to put an amendment as set out in appendix D and F to the papers, which whilst it could not address some anomalies he felt addressed the remaining anomaly of Takeley. He said the Administration's revised scheme had made a pig's ear of Hatfield Broad Oak in order to add on to Takeley. The proposal now before Council was marginal in numbers, and was the worst scheme of all that had been suggested, as Takeley would have an electorate only a fraction under 10% departure from electoral equality. Neither did the revised scheme work well on corridors of movement.

He felt the proposal that a rural ward should be represented by three members would be rejected by the Commission; and that a proposed ward that stretched from Broxted to the middle of Hatfield Broad Oak was a nonsense. There was something amiss in that when he had presented his minority scheme to the Electoral Working Group he was told his proposed ward for the parishes from Broxted to High Roding was too long. The Conservatives had come up with only a partial solution, although at least their proposal now separated Elsenham from Takeley. Presenting a proposal with anomalies to iron out would make the Council look incompetent. He therefore proposed the scheme set out at Appendix F, which although it too might require some tweaking, he considered more sensible than the Administration's proposal. In deference to the strength of the representations at this meeting from residents of Debden Green he was willing to change his proposal so that Debden Green would remain within the Debden and Wimbish ward.

Councillor Morson seconded the amendment. He said he did so for the reasons of logic which Councillor Dean had stated, which he supported. The Liberal Democrat group had throughout the process been very active in trying to produce this scheme, and he believed Appendix F was the preferable one and met all the concerns which members of the public had raised.

Councillor Ketteridge said regarding Councillor Dean's reference to anomalies that his scheme proposed a cut off of Wicken Bonhunt from Clavering and Little Walden from Saffron Walden, ignoring representations the Council had received. The Council had tried to take into account representations.

Councillor Cheetham said she would not support the minority scheme, and disagreed with what Councillor Dean had said regarding the proposals for Takeley.

Councillor Jones said he was against the amendment. The villages of Takeley and Little Canfield had objected to the suggestion that they should be split and did not want to be joined with Elsenham and Henham. Priors Green was not a settlement, but simply the name given to a new development in Takeley and Little Canfield. These were the identities the residents wished to retain. Regarding the substantive proposal whilst it was not ideal it was put forward in the interests of moving on and members were aware of the deadline, following which there would be further consultation.

Councillor Rolfe said perfection was a subjective criterion, and achieving it was a struggle. He said the minority scheme had more flaws than the substantive motion. He did not think it was wrong to approach the Commission with anomalies, and the Commission would not find that approach unacceptable. He supported the key motion and suggested the meeting proceed to a vote.

Councillor Howell said he had in the past suggested reducing the number of councillors, but acknowledged the process required much work. Regarding The Sampfords, this was one of the largest wards, and the inclusion of Little Bardfield would make it even larger. He supported the principle that rural wards should have one member. He considered the substantive motion superior to the amendment and would support the proposal as set out at Appendix J.

The Chairman asked members to put to the vote the amendment put forward by the Liberal Democrat Group as set out at appendices D and F in the papers.

There were four votes in favour, 28 against and one abstention. The amendment was therefore rejected.

The substantive motion was then put to the vote. There were 27 votes in favour, five against and no abstentions.

RESOLVED to submit to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England the Council's preferred option for a revised electoral scheme as set out at appendices G and H to the report, with the various associated maps.

The Chairman said on behalf of all Members that she wished to thank Mr Snow, who with his usual good temper had revised the revisions until the Council had something most Members could work with.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.

PUBLIC STATEMENTS

Lord Vernon

I wish to voice concern regarding the proposed separation of Debden Green from the rest of Debden Village. I have been a resident of Debden Green for over 40 years and am secretary of Debden Church Council. I have received many representations supporting the views I intend to express, including from the Head of Debden Primary School. The village needs one district councillor to look after its interests, just as it has one school, one playground, one pub, one sports facility. It is three and a half miles from Henham. Debden Green residents don't tend to participate in community of Henham and Broxton. A councillor who was based in those villages would not have an understanding of the Debden community. If parish council boundaries are then reviewed then Debden Green could find itself in a different ward entirely, and if the Church were then to align its boundaries on the same lines there could be significant implications for parishioners, such as where they could be buried.

Statement of Jeannette O'Brien

I have been a resident of Debden and on the boundary of Chickney for 12 years. The Parish magazine is delivered to my house every month, we are members of the Church and attend various social events in the community. I agree with Lord Vernon. Appendix C in the papers refers to a link between Debden Green and the villages of Henham and Chickney. On paper there could be a link but most people in Debden Green would in fact be linked to Debden Parish. I would draw attention to the criteria of the LCBCE which are meant to carry equal weight. I submit that the Council has not paid sufficient equal attention to the second criterion.

Statement of Stewart Luck

I have lived in the village of Debden many years, and represent the Parish Council. I refer to the written submission by Debden Parish Council to the Chief Executive. Wards should reflect common bonds; Henham and Debden Green are not even linked by a bus service. There would be apathy if people did not feel part of their community. I feel there has been insufficient public consultation. Debden residents only recently became aware of the proposal to reduce the number of councillors to 39. There has been much legislation and district councillors have had their work cut out for them, so 39 doing the task of the current 44 would be a challenge. Localism still seems a pipe dream. In our ward we had no problem, and central government is meddling in citizens' affairs. I suggest the Council pushes localism and tells the Government not to make change for change's sake. With those in the Armed Services also in mind, please listen to the electorate, and please give assurance that parish boundaries will not change.