

ITEM 10 – Local Government Boundary Commission consultation on Electoral arrangements for Uttlesford

ELECTORAL WORKING GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.00 pm on 30 MAY 2013

Present: Councillors R Chambers, J Davey and J Ketteridge.

Also present: Councillors E J Godwin and D Morson as non-voting substitutes.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), L Bunting (Democratic Services Officer) and P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager).

EWG1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was proposed that Councillor Chambers be appointed Chairman for the ensuing year. This was agreed.

EWG2 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Dean, J Freeman, M Lemon and J Rose. There were no declarations of interest.

EWG3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. There was no business arising.

EWG4 FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW (FER)

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager reported that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had published draft recommendations in April 2013 for the future electoral arrangements in the Uttlesford District. The consultation period would close on 8 July 2013. The Council meeting in July had been rescheduled to 1 July to allow time for any comments the Council wished to make and agree to any response to the LGBCE recommendations. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager then went on to outline the differences between the published recommendations and the Council's proposals.

Chesterford and Elmdon

The proposed separate single member wards of Chesterford and Littlebury and Elmdon and Wenden had been merged into a proposed two member ward to be named as Chesterford and Elmdon. The LGBCE proposed this arrangement because of the high opposing variances in the wards proposed

by the Council. The recommended arrangement had the advantage of overcoming the proposed split of Littlebury parish between different wards but the disadvantage of substituting a large two member ward in a rural area. The Council's proposals were based upon the principle that rural parishes should be represented by a single member to avoid becoming unmanageably big. The proposed ward would include eight parishes and six parish councils.

Saffron Walden

There was to be an adjustment between the proposed Castle and Shire ward boundaries in Saffron Walden affecting approximately 170 electors. The LGBCE report said that while the adjustment would slightly worsen electoral equality in these wards to 6% fewer and 3% more electors per councillor respectively, it would provide a stronger boundary.

Clavering

The Council's submission had proposed the inclusion of Wicken Bonhunt within the Newport ward but at the same time requested that Wicken Bonhunt be retained in the Clavering ward. The LGBCE had decided that Wicken Bonhunt should remain in the Clavering ward even though this would worsen electoral equality in Newport from 3% fewer to 9% fewer electors than the average.

Stansted North and Stort Valley

The LGBCE had decided to create a three member ward combining Stort Valley with Stansted North. This was because the inclusion of Ugley in the proposed Stort Valley ward was not considered appropriate as it had no direct road links to other communities in the proposed ward. The LGBCE's solution was to merge the two proposed wards together to form a three member ward.

Great Dunmow North

The LGBCE had decided not to support the Council's proposal to transfer a small area of Little Easton parish, which currently had no electors, to Great Dunmow North ward. It was acknowledged that the Council had done this because the area would fall within the Woodlands Park development but the area was not considered to be viable as a parish ward. The LGBCE had therefore said that the issue would be best addressed by a community governance review once the FER was complete and the new electors in place. The EWG would therefore have to consider this in the future.

Felsted and Stebbing

The LGBCE had also decided not to adopt the Council's proposal for a single member Stebbing ward to include Little Dunmow and the eastern part of Felsted parish, and a two member ward combining most of Felsted with Flich Green. Their draft recommendation was for a two member Felsted and Stebbing ward and a single member Little Dunmow and Flich Green ward. The reason provided was that the eastern part of Felsted had no direct road links with the remainder of the ward proposed by the Council. This reasoning was dubious as there were also no direct road links between Felsted and

Stebbing. It would therefore be for members to decide whether the LGBCE's recommendation was a better arrangement than the original proposal. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said that the naming of the Little Dunmow and Flitch Green ward would be better named as Flitch Green and Little Dunmow, both in terms of alphabetical arrangement and to reflect the size of the respective communities.

Little Walden

The LGBCE had decided not to adopt the Council's request for a departure from the rule relating to electoral equality to enable Little Walden to remain part of a Saffron Walden based ward instead of becoming part of the proposed Ashdon ward. This was because of the need to secure good electoral equality in Ashdon ward and to reflect the rural nature of Little Walden and the road links to Hadstock parish. If members wanted to pursue a request to depart from electoral equality requirements this could be done. However it should be noted that the LGBCE's report made it clear that, irrespective of other considerations, the prime aim of the review was to achieve electoral fairness within a local authority which was stated to be a fundamental democratic principle. It therefore seemed unlikely that the LGBCE would agree to a departure from those principles.

Birchanger

Councillor Godwin had made representations on behalf of Birchanger. She said that the parish had accepted reluctantly that there was no viable alternative to the linkage of Birchanger with part of Stansted but it was argued that the name of the ward should incorporate Birchanger. If this were to be agreed the renaming of the ward to Stansted South and Birchanger was suggested. However there were many similar mergers elsewhere, for example, between Stansted North and Stort Valley. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager considered that long ward titles should be avoided except where absolutely necessary to reflect the nature of the ward.

Broad Oak and the Hallingburys and Takeley

There had been discussion in the report about the nature of the proposed Broad Oak and the Hallingburys and Takeley wards. The LGBCE had concerns about the proposed transfer of part of Hatfield Broad Oak to Takeley ward. It would be remembered that the Council had changed its proposals at a late stage to incorporate a three member ward for Takeley, to include Little Canfield, Priors Green, Broxted and Chickney as well as Bush End. This had not previously been considered because the EWG had adopted guidelines to propose mainly single member wards in rural areas.

Councillor Ketteridge said that his group wished to propose retaining Bush End within Broad Oak and the Hallingburys. However, as with the case of Little Walden mentioned before, it appeared that the proposed Takeley ward would remain unviable without the inclusion of Bush End.

Councillor Morson referred to Stansted North and Stort Valley and considered that with five parishes involved the proposal had no community cohesion.

However he reported that Felsted Parish Council was reasonably happy with the proposed change to their ward.

Councillor Ketteridge reiterated points made before concerning Little Walden, and reuniting Bush End with Broad Oak and the Hallingburys. Councillor Godwin said that the community of Birchanger was not happy with the loss of identity at being merged with Stansted South and hoped that it would be possible to retain the name Birchanger as part of the ward title.

Councillor Chambers referred to Chesterford and Elmdon and said that he felt it was important to the local community that the name Wenden Lofts should be retained for reasons of historic association and identity rather than Elmdon.

Councillor Davey commented that Great Dunmow South should also incorporate the name Barnston in the title.

It was therefore proposed that the following changes be put forward to the Council meeting on 1 July 2013 to agree a response to the LGBCE recommendations:

- 1 Little Walden be retained within the Saffron Walden Castle ward and not transferred to Ashdon ward.
- 2 Bush End be retained within the Broad Oak and the Hallingburys ward and not transferred to Takeley.
- 3 The renaming of Stansted South ward to Stansted South and Birchanger in order for Birchanger to keep its identity.
- 4 The renaming of Chesterford and Elmdon to Wenden Lofts and the Chesterfords for reasons of historic association and to retain community identity.
- 5 The renaming of Little Dunmow and Flich Green ward to Flich Green and Little Dunmow ward for a better alphabetic arrangement and to reflect the size of the respective communities
- 6 The renaming of the Great Dunmow South ward to Great Dunmow South and Barnston.

It was therefore

RECOMMENDED that the above proposals be put to the Council meeting on 1 July as a response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations.

The meeting ended at 7.25 pm.