

Local Government Boundary Commission review of Ward Boundaries

– Malvern Hills District

Introduction

Abberley Parish Council wish to object to the first recommendations of the Boundary Commission and suggest an alternative arrangement for the north of the Malvern Hills District as an improvement. In particular the Parish is concerned at the creation of a new two member ward named Martley and Teme Valley. This would leave Abberley apart from those with which it has closer connections in a ward stretching from the edge of Wyre Forest in the north to beyond the River Teme in the south and connected only by minor roads and with little cohesion of the communities contained. The proposal also breaks local ward village associations that have existed for at least 50 years.

The Recommended Arrangement

The conclusion could be drawn from reading the recommendation report, that the new wards in this part of the District were created firstly by establishing an ideal arrangement for Broadheath and then forming Hallow with the subsequent adjustment to Baldwin. With little scope for material alternatives for Tenbury and Lindridge, this left a number of villages (including Abberley) surplus which were joined together with other villages further south in the same predicament.

The result is a proposed long narrow ward covering a sixth of the area of the whole District and linking together parishes with very little common identity or interests at the same time as breaking existing links between communities that have been in place since before the District was formed. The main roads are based on an east/west basis whilst the ward is primarily on a north/south line on minor roads which has no public transport connection.

Whilst satisfying the numerical criteria, it would not appear to meet the other two, namely efficient government and community identity. The ward would also split some current parish council arrangements.

In terms of governance the new councillors would have to attend nine different Parish Council meetings each cycle, at a distance varying up to some 12 miles apart using minor roads, with the same issues when visiting residents. Almost a full working week could be spent merely travelling to Parish Council meetings, before considering the time spent there with further visits to residents. They would have to deal with three different County Councillors. They would represent residents variously looking towards Worcester, Wyre Forest and Malvern.

There is little community link or interest between Abberley and Cotheridge, Broadwas , Lulsley (which would have its existing Parish arrangement split) and Doddenham. It even has limited connections with Martley village.

Suggested Alternative

The Parish Council proposes the following as an alternative (as Appendix 1) , based largely on long established wards with amendments only as required to meet the number requirements.

- a) Tenbury and Lindridge Wards – no change
- b) Alfrick and Leigh Two members

The current two member ward could be maintained with the addition of Rushwick, accepting the Commissions proposal to split that parish from Broadheath.

- c) Broadheath and Hallow - Two members

The current two member ward including Broadheath could be maintained by adding the current Hallow ward to replace Rushwick and leave further room for the growth of housing under the SWDP after 2027, much of which is at an advanced planning stage.

This would form a ward on the Boundary with Worcester whose residents have a common interest in dealing with the advantages and disadvantages of such.

- d) Current Baldwin and Woodbury Wards - Two members

Whilst this proposal does not meet the desire of the Parish to be in a single member ward , it does combine communities which have close links and is a much more compact ward in terms of geography and communication.

This proposal would link together two wards that existed before the last boundary reorganisation and many years before, with the addition of Wichenford and Kenswick. Whilst losing the advantage of single member representation , this would maintain many existing links between communities which closely associate with each other. Many residents across the villages have a common tendency to look towards towns outside Malvern Hills (chiefly in Wyre Forest and Droitwich) , with lesser links to Worcester. Such common interest is best represented by councillors focussed on this and not with a greater division of scope of influence.

The ward would have the main A 443 at its heart with a variety of minor roads branching off to the other communities. It would therefore have a common interest in the traffic aspect of the South Worcestershire Development Plan Review and this is demonstrated by the joint approach of six of the parishes to the District Council's recent public consultation. Local Planning issues are common to all the parishes. It is a far more compact area than the recommended Martley and Teme Valley ward.

Abberley receives its medical services from Great Witley where the local health centre is based and uses petrol stations in Great Witley and Dunley, which are also the closest such facilities for Holt. That village's Millennium Green provides open space and play area for children used by its neighbouring villages. All the villages come within The Chantry School catchment area for secondary education.

In relation to new linkages, the Shelsleys which were previously in the same ward before the last reorganisation are adjacent to Great Witley and Abberley and rely on those villages for services. Little Witley looks towards both Great Witley and Holt for post office services shopping and leisure facilities , Holt and Abberley for pubs and catering and some residents of Holt would actually

consider themselves part of Little Witley due to their adjoining geographical position. The countryside of Little Witley providing outdoor walking and enjoyed by many the village residents blends into that of Wichenford and the boundary where it adjoins zigzags along the lane with houses on both sides in different parishes.



The view from Holt Millennium Green over Great Witley, Hillhampton, Little Witley and Shrawley to Abberley.

e) Martley Ward - One Member

This maintains the link to Clifton suggested in the recommendations (which also existed before the last reorganisation) and allows for the single member representation sought by many. There is also a bus service between the two villages.

Conclusion

We submit that the suggested alternative would more effectively meet the criteria on which the reorganisation is based and should welcome the opportunity to discuss and to physically show the Commission the geography as seen in the above photograph and examine the linkages in situ.

Appendix 1

Leigh Alfrick	Two
Alfrick	511
Bransford	435
Leigh Hurst	491
Leigh Sinton	870
Lulsley	120
Suckley	513
Rushwick	1840
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	4780
Target	4512
Variance Number	268
Variance %	5.9

Broadheath	Two
Broadwas	337
Cotheridge	215
Broadheath	2123
Grimley	549
Hallow	1223
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	4447
Target	4512
Variance Number	-65
Variance %	-1.4

Baldwin	Two
Astley Dunley	967
Holt	577
Shrawley	388
Shelsley Beauchamp	193
Shelsley Kings	166
Shelsey Walsh	18
Abberley	699
Great Witley	603
Hillhampton	124
Little Witley	263
Wichenford	423
Kenswick	63
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	4484
Target	4512
Variance Number	-28
Variance %	-0.6

Martley	One
Doddenham	227
Knightwick	93
Martley	1164
Clifton	718
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	2202
Target	2256
Variance Number	-54
Variance %	-2.4

Lindridge	One
Bayton	457
Knighton on Teme	469
Lindridge	655
Stockton	119
Mamble	265
Pensax	294

2259

Target	2256
Variance Number	3
Variance %	0.1

Tenbury	Two
Bockleton	166
Kyre	105
Rochford	205
Stoke Bliss	189
Tenbury Town	2583
Tenbury St Michaels	315
Eastham	215
Hanley	253
Lower Sapey	156
Stanford with Orleton	151

4338

Target	4512
Variance Number	-174
Variance %	-3.9