

Evenley Parish Council meeting, Monday 24th April 2023

Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) draft recommendations on new electoral arrangements for West Northamptonshire

1 Background

A review of ward boundaries across West Northamptonshire Council area will be published by LGBCE in August 2023. This is the second public consultation about the arrangements. EPC submitted representations to LGBCE on 29th September 2022, writing, "No comments."

All existing ward boundaries will change, and the total number of ward councillors will reduce from 93 to 76. Wards will be represented by one, two or three councillors.

The changes will take effect at the next set of local elections in May 2025.

The review aims to set out "a good pattern of wards", which will

- Provide good electoral quality (ie each councillor representing as closely as possible the same number of electors);
- Reflect community interests and identities, and include evidence of community links;
- Be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries; and
- Help WNC deliver effective and convenient local government.

The LGBCE summary report is available here:

https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/summary_3.pdf

It sets out more information about these considerations.

The full report is available here:

https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/west_northamptonshire_draft_recommendations_report_for_publication.pdf

Pages 42 -47 of the report set out the considerations behind proposals for the southwest of WNC, ie between Towcester, Brackley and Woodford/Weedon south of Daventry.

2 Proposal affecting Evenley parish

Our current ward (Middleton Cheney) includes the parishes of Aynho, Charlton, Croughton, Evenley, Farthinghoe, Hinton, Kings Sutton, Middleton Cheney, Newbottle, Overthorpe, Thenford and is represented by three councillors.

The proposal divides the ward into two – Middleton Cheney (Chacombe, Farthinghoe, Greatworth, Marston St Lawrence and Middleton Cheney) and Kings Sutton (Aynho, Charlton & Newbottle, Croughton, Evenley, Kings Sutton, Overthorpe and Thenford) – each with one councillor.

This proposal meets the criteria set out above, including electoral quality.

In paragraph 237 (page 45) the Commissioners state, "***We note that these wards can be combined to form a two-councillor ward and we welcome comments with community interest evidence on whether this would be a better option.***"

Combining the two wards would not affect electoral quality.

3 Points for discussion

EPC needs to decide if it is in the best interests of our community to be represented by one councillor over a smaller area, or two councillors over broadly the same area as currently.

If we are to advocate for the two-councillor one ward solution, we will need to demonstrate that this will better “*reflect community interests and identities and include evidence of strong community links.*” In particular, we would have to demonstrate local Evenley links to Middleton Cheney, as well as to Kings Sutton.

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Comments for your views

Evenley has links to Middleton Cheney.....

- *Secondary school (Chenderit) attended by some Evenley children, with art gallery (Heseltine Gallery) open daily, visited by residents;*
- *Leisure facilities (exercise studio and classes) frequented by residents;*
- *Good road links (A422);*
- *Similar rural issues face the whole area – eg planning (village environments, housing pressures and affordability for local people, encroachment on open countryside), policing (rural and village issues), social isolation, transport (or lack of), high quality rural environment;*
- *Farthinghoe Recycling Centre is used by all local villages and households from further afield;*
- *Former NCC Division (“Middleton Cheney”) is long established and all parishes are used to working together as part of this.*

We could start to build a case for a two- councillor ward. My personal view is that it is preferable to be represented by two councillors, as this is more resilient (if one is away, or indisposed for example) and it also means that we would benefit from the knowledge and expertise of two councillors.

Of the other parishes in the Middleton Cheney and Kings Sutton Wards as proposed, it appears that Kings Sutton is in favour of the two-ward proposal, and indeed originated the idea in original representations to the first consultation late last year.

Note that, although the report states that the more southern parishes in the area (ie Evenley) have strongest links to Brackley for services (eg Drs Surgeries) and supermarkets, it is not an option for Brackley (three-councillor ward) to include any surrounding parishes, and that might not be in the interests of the Evenley community.

What are the thoughts of others?

Please get in touch – 07595 606065

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14.04.23