


Agenda Item No:	9	
Committee:	Council	
Date:	23 March 2017	
Report Title:	Parliamentary Constituency Review – Fenland District Council Consultation Submission	

1 Purpose / Summary

For Council to consider and agree the Fenland District Council consultation submission to the Boundary Commission for England in regards to the Parliamentary Constituency Review

2 Key issues

- The 2018 Parliamentary constituency review was initiated as Parliament has specified that the number of Parliamentary Constituencies in the United Kingdom must reduce from 650 down to 600. In England that equates to a reduction of Parliamentary constituencies from 533 to 501. More locally, the Eastern Region in which Fenland sits has been allocated 57 constituencies – a reduction of one from the current number.
- The Boundary Commission for England has been tasked to review and recommend the new boundaries for those constituencies.
- The law requires that every new constituency (with the exception of four specific island constituencies) must have roughly the same number of electors, no fewer than 71,031 and no more than 78,507. As well as electoral equality, which aims to give everyone's vote the same weight, legislation also states that when deciding on boundaries the Commission may take into account
 - Special geographical considerations, including the size, shape and accessibility of the constituency
 - Local government boundaries as they exist on 7 May 2015
 - Boundaries of existing constituencies and
 - Any local ties that would be broken by changes in constituencies
- In February 2016 The Boundary Commission for England (BCE) announced that they would be conducting a new review of Parliamentary Constituency boundaries in England. The review is called the 2018 review, as although it commenced in 2016 the review must report its recommendations by September 2018.
- On 13 September 2016 the Commission published initial proposals for new constituencies in England, which opened a twelve week consultation period. On 28 February 2017 the Commission published the responses to the initial proposals, which triggered the second statutory four week consultation period, which runs until 27 March 2017.

- Members of the District Council are keen to submit formal consultation feedback to the Commission which is endorsed by full Council as there have been a number of responses to the initial proposals which, if supported by the Commission, may result in Fenland being split between two new Parliamentary Constituencies. This would result in areas of Fenland being represented by two different Members of Parliament.
- In the initial proposals published by the Commission in September 2016 Fenland District is wholly contained within the North East Cambridgeshire constituency, as it has been since the constituency's creation in 1983.
- The initial round of consultation on the published proposals has resulted in a number of alternative proposals for the North East Cambridgeshire Constituency. In the event that these proposals are adopted by the Boundary Commission, some district wards within Fenland District would be moved into the North West Cambridgeshire Constituency. The wards potentially affected are Chatteris and/or Doddington and Wimblington.
- The remainder of Fenland District would continue to be represented by the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency. As such there is a potential risk that Fenland would be represented by two Members of Parliament.
- Fenland District has a strong sense of community and community ties, it is a rural area with four market towns surrounded by villages and hamlets. The proposal that Fenland District is potentially being split into two separate Parliamentary Constituencies is considered to be disjointed as well as not reflective of existing community ties. It is the fact that the proposal comments do not comply with all the criteria for consideration when undertaking a Parliamentary Constituency Review which has been the catalyst for the Council consultation submission.

3 Recommendations

For Council to agree the consultation response that Chatteris, Doddington and Wimblington be retained within the North East Cambridgeshire Parliamentary Constituency in accordance with the original proposals put forward by the Boundary Commission for England

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Member Working Group: Cllr Chris Boden Cllr Gavin Booth Cllr Virginia Bucknor Cllr Anne Hay Cllr Samantha Hoy Cllr Will Sutton Cllr Fred Yeulett
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Background Paper(s)	Boundary Commission for England Review 2018

4 Background

- 4.1 The background to Fenland is important when considering future Parliamentary Constituency boundaries as it illustrates the attractions and potential challenges associated with the area. Due to the strength of local community ties and synergy across Fenland as a whole it makes a compelling case for retaining the entire district within one Parliamentary Constituency where the prevailing issues can be effectively addressed and represented by one Member of Parliament.
- 4.2 Located in East Anglia, Fenland covers approximately 200 square miles and is one of five districts within the county of Cambridgeshire. Fenland is a rural and sparsely populated district with many rural communities. Fenland has strong community spirit and pride in its heritage.
- 4.3 Over 98,000 people live in the district, with 75% living in the four market towns of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech. The remaining 25% of the Fenland population lives within the 29 villages and hamlets located across the district.
- 4.4 With the lowest house prices in Cambridgeshire and plentiful availability of commercial land, Fenland is an attractive place to live and do business in. As such, our population is growing quickly and by 2031 it is predicted that there will be over 113,000 people living here.
- 4.5 Fenland does face some challenges. It is the 80th (out of 326) most deprived area in the country. We recognise the challenges that deprivation brings, particularly around education and health.
- 4.6 Our population is also getting older. 25% of our residents are pensioners, and this is expected to increase to 41% by 2024. We know that 1 in 7 pensioners in Fenland live alone.
- 4.7 As well as the issues outlined above Fenland also faces other challenges including the following
- Low levels of educational attainment, aspiration and skills - however, the number of pupils gaining 5 + A* - C grades in Fenland has increased, from 36% in 2000 to 62% in 2010.
 - Lowest levels of healthy eating and exercise in the East of England.

- Highest levels of smoking in the East of England.
- High levels of migration into the district – particularly from Eastern Europe leading to issues of community cohesion, housing and access to services.
- One of largest populations of Gypsy Travellers in the country.
- Poor public transport links and infrastructure.

4.8 Other issues also exist within the district, which are not as visible such as rural isolation, literacy levels and levels of caring for family members. These complex challenges have led the Council with its partners to generate proactive and innovative solutions which have improved quality of life for the residents of Fenland.

5 Electoral Equality

5.1 The original Parliamentary Constituency proposals published by the Boundary Commission for England in September 2016 saw all of Fenland district, in addition to two areas from East Cambridgeshire (Downham Villages and Sutton) encompassed within the North East Cambridgeshire constituency. Fenland District has been wholly retained in the North East Cambridgeshire constituency since its creation in 1983, emphasising the community identity and strength of local ties. The original proposal would result in an electorate for the proposed constituency of 75,727, which is within the threshold set by the Commission. The initial proposals meet the primary legislative requirement in relation to electoral equality.

6 Local Ties

- 6.1 The Fenland District is a cohesive set of settlements characterised by their rural characteristics with similar issues and outlook – all served by one District Council. The maintenance of the whole Council area within the North East Cambridgeshire boundary of the Parliamentary Constituency is essential to maintaining community ties, community spirit and the collective heritage the District has. The area has a great collective affinity stretching back to 1974 when the District Council was created and the Parliamentary Constituency reflected and strengthened that in 1983 when it was created. By changing this, this will impact on the strong community cohesion that has been built up over a number of years which is reflected in the interaction between the Towns and villages in the District in relation to access to the road network, amenities and shopping.
- 6.2 The Fens are a defined geographical area identified by the many waterways, drains and rivers to keep the District well drained, which is a common heritage shared across the four market towns of Chatteris, March, Wisbech and Whittlesey and the surrounding villages including Doddington and Wimblington.
- 6.3 Chatteris is located to the south of the Fenland District with a population of approximately 9,000 residents. It has strong connections to the rest of the District via the A141.
- 6.4 Chatteris has a natural affinity through the road network to the other Fenland town of March for shopping and amenities, as there are a small number of shops on the High Street and a weekly market, therefore the main shopping town is March located further to the north of the district via the A141. Increasing numbers of school students from across Fenland attend the Ofsted rated ‘Good’ Cromwell Secondary School including those from neighbouring villages including Doddington, Wimblington and March, therefore it is

important these ties are not broken through creating a separate constituency which means students will be travelling outside of a boundary to attend school.

- 6.5 Chatteris residents identify themselves as very much part of the wider district and associate themselves as such. Due to the further distance from Chatteris to Huntingdon compared to Chatteris and March this limits the connection with other towns within the proposed North West parliamentary constituency.
- 6.6 Chatteris experiences many of the issues which are relevant to other wards across the district including quality of life, an aging population, migration, access to employment, and transport and infrastructure related issues. It is the view of elected members that the whole of Fenland District should be represented by one Member of Parliament to ensure the key issues are understood and addressed in a consistent manner, rather than elements of the district including Chatteris or Doddington and Wimblington being represented by a Member of Parliament who may have different priorities.
- 6.7 Doddington and Wimblington is a combined Fenland District ward however both are distinct parishes with their own strong sense of village identity. Both villages have access to the A141 with transport links to Chatteris and March. March is the main shopping centre for the villages and numerous residents travel to March in order to gain access to the busy train station with access to Peterborough, as well as employment.
- 6.8 Children attend the primary schools located within the villages however in relation to secondary school education children travel in increasing numbers to Chatteris to Cromwell College or Neale Wade Academy in March.
- 6.9 Doddington is home to the local non emergency community hospital which is the hub of local health provision across Fenland. As a result Fenland residents travel from across the district to access local accessible health care.
- 6.10 Chatteris, Wimblington and Doddington have been an integral part of Fenland District since its inception in 1974. Whilst we appreciate that is not in question as part of the Parliamentary Constituency Review, what that does emphasise is the strong, consistent and stable sense of community has existed for a generation. It is therefore the strong belief that the proposal to split these communities into North West Cambridgeshire parliamentary constituency whilst the remainder of Fenland will be part of North East Cambridgeshire would break and fracture those strong community ties which have existed successfully for so long.

7 Challenge to the alternative proposals for North East Cambridgeshire Constituency

- 7.1 During the initial consultation period an alternative suggestion was put forward in relation to the North East Cambridgeshire constituency. This involved retaining Littleport within North East Cambridgeshire. The implications of this proposal are that the electorate figure would exceed the threshold set by the commission in order to achieve electoral equality.
- 7.2 As a result in order to achieve the required electorate figure the proposal was to move Chatteris to the North West Cambridgeshire constituency or a second proposal was to move Doddington and Wimblington into North West Cambridgeshire. Both of these proposals cause a 'ripple effect' in relation to electorate figures which has a significant impact on a number of the initial constituency proposals.

- 7.3 The proposition for Littleport to remain in Cambridgeshire was supported as the consultee stated that this would enable the Norfolk parliamentary constituencies to be wholly contained within Norfolk. However the impact from the subsequent moves results in the areas of Kimbolton & Straughton and Brampton being moved into North East Bedfordshire in order to make the final proposals meet the electorate requirements. This does not reflect the desire to retain areas of Cambridgeshire within Cambridgeshire nor the devolution area of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It also does not fit with the Boundary Commissions decision to group Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk into a sub region with Bedfordshire, Essex and Suffolk remaining within their own county boundaries.
- 7.4 Furthermore the proposal to move Chatteris into the new North West Parliamentary constituency results in a knock on effect to 6 other constituency proposals and includes moving the areas of Launditch and Lincoln from Breckland which is currently wholly contained within Mid Norfolk to South Norfolk and the areas of Bressingham & Burston and Burnwell from South Norfolk which is currently wholly contained in South Norfolk to North Norfolk.
- 7.5 The proposal to move Wimblington and Doddington into the North West Parliamentary constituency results in a knock on effect to 4 other original constituency proposals. The proposed movement of Chatteris into the North West Cambridgeshire constituency will impact on local community ties and is a significant and detrimental to the local area.

8 Summary

Fenland District Council fully endorses the original Boundary Commission proposals in respect of North East Cambridgeshire. This proposal would contain in its entirety the Fenland District as this achieves the legislative requirement in relation to electoral equality and is also reflective of the strong and long established community ties in the area.