

Solihull

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Comment text:

Related subject: Meriden and objection to the proposal to move this into Arden

I disagree with the proposed changing of boundaries to bring Meriden into the new 'Arden' ward.

My first objection to this is that our ward councillors will be miles removed from the interests of Meriden, whereas the current ward consists of Meriden and the villages IMMEDIATELY next to it and the councillors are drawn from a pool of people who actually live in Meriden and the villages next to it. The ward councillors that we have, have a deep understanding of the locality. The proposed new boundary will be divisive in terms of how Meriden and its residents are represented as the councillors will be from an existing ward that Meriden is proposed to be drawn into, which is on the edge of Birmingham rather than from a group of neighbouring rural villages. The new ward councillors will not have lived knowledge and experience of Meriden (e.g. Agriculture, quarries and targeted conservation) to effectively represent the community, and will have existing alliances and interests which will be far removed from what the residents of Meriden need.

This process seems completely undemocratic and of no help to affected communities. The level of consultation on this proposal has been virtually non-existent and all residents should have been notified directly. This proposal from the get-go has almost completely ignored the communities involved and most people have found out about this by accident, and it has completely ignored any notion of differential access to information channels. Before anything else happens, a letter should be issued to ALL residents in all potentially affected areas explaining with honesty the reasoning behind this, the full proposal and likely impacts . Based on this, this proposal should be delayed by at least 6 months for proper stakeholder engagement to take place. The proposal does not make sense as the other neighbourhoods are a significant distance from Meriden and the 'Arden' ward would separate it from its nearest neighbouring villages who share very similar concerns and issues which the current

Meriden Ward is set up to manage as a reasonably spaced catchment area size, by councillors with local knowledge and experience who we would lose as a result of the change. Other councillors incoming under 'Arden' (which is predominantly made up of Birmingham suburbs rather than the Meriden ward's current rural grouping of villages) would have existing allegiances and knowledge to current constituents and would put Meriden residents at a disadvantage. Meriden has its own dynamic and a one size fits all to cover Meriden, Bickenhill, Marston Green and Chelmsley Wood will not take into account the unique needs of the village (and focus on issues of agriculture, quarries and targeted conservation), or for that matter of the other neighbourhoods that Arden is proposing to put under a new electoral constituency.

There is also the factor of Meriden being in green belt and a historically significant village (containing heritage sites) along with its connection with Berkswell and Balsall Common, and it is vital that green space and a sense of community cohesion is maintained within Meriden and the immediate neighbouring villages. We have recently completed a village plan which should be legally binding, within a democratic parish councils structure.

It seems that this proposal is coming from Whitehall, and as I understand / my experience so far is that this was not something that was requested by Meriden or any of the communities proposed to be encompassed within Arden and seems like a case of being 'done to' without much genuine consideration to residents or the integrity of green space and local heritage.

This seemingly is a precursor to merging all neighbourhoods into a new town which is often discussed, which again has not been subject to anything remotely representing a democratic process.

Maintaining the services and community dynamic that we currently have in Meriden with strong and effective Ward Councillors is particularly important as Meriden has suffered greatly in terms of pressure on services and destruction of green belt in the wake of HS2, and other developments forced upon the village. Maintaining and building the community within its current boundary arrangement is a crucial part of community cohesion and healing.

Meriden ward will lose a key and culturally significant aspect in having its name changed to Arden and the boundary change that goes with this. In addition to changes forced upon residents mentioned in my previous paragraph, it is completely unreasonable to change boundaries as this will undoubtedly affect access to services including medical, educational and cultural which have been hard earned, and I as a resident and other residents are not under any circumstances willing for these to be compromised.

If the commission does not understand the issue we are facing, I'll pose a hypothetical question - would the Boundary Commission allow London to be put into a ward with Bognor Regis? Probably not, as there would be an outcry no doubt, from residents of 'historic' London. This may be news to the legislators, but people in Meriden and other parts of the country also want to maintain their identity and the things that make their communities work for them.

In short, the change to Arden seems undemocratic and detrimental, and I would urge the commission to reconsider this in favour of maintaining the existing boundaries.

Ward counsellors from a different area will not have the experience or resource to cover the jurisdiction effectively, and we will lose the experience, care and attention that we currently get.

Attached Documents:

None attached