

# **A response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's report on "New Electoral Arrangements for Rushcliffe, Draft Recommendations, October 2021", by Aslockton Parish Council and Whatton-in-the-Vale Parish Council.**

**25<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

## **Introduction**

This document sets out the position of both Aslockton Parish Council and Whatton-in-the-Vale Parish Council in opposition to the proposed new electoral recommendations with regards to the impact on our parishes and our inclusion in the proposed new two member ward "Aslockton and Cropwell".

The review describes 3 objectives:

- Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents;
- Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity;
- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

This document sets out our concern that in striving to achieve electoral equality, the recommendations compromise the requirement to ensure a fair reflection of community identity and the associated democratic structures.

## **Response of Aslockton Parish Council and Whatton-in-the-Vale Parish Council**

Firstly, we appreciate the challenge faced by the LGBCE in endeavouring to achieve acceptable electoral equality whilst balancing that with stated community identity from feedback from the first consultation. We are conscious that our parish councils have not provided detailed feedback (relative to say the Upper Saxondale Residents Association) and intend to do so with this response.

We also accept that there is a logic of including Elton-on-the-Hill, Granby, Tithby and Wiverton Hall parishes and the northern section of Langar cum Barnstone parish in a ward with Aslockton and Whatton-in-the-Vale. We also understand the challenge stated of creating separate 'Cropwell' and 'Aslockton' single member wards in the case of the former (including Cropwell Bishop, Cropwell Butler and Upper Saxondale) having 14% more electors than the Borough average.

We also don't want to simply state the case for our parishes in isolation of these challenges and intend to make our argument in the wider context of North East Rushcliffe, contributing the LGBCE's efforts to find a reasonable settlement for this part of the borough.

Based on the numbers of electors cited, the LGBCE has a fundamental challenge in this part of the borough: it needs to fit four councillors into three distinct areas of identity albeit with some marginalisation between them. They are:

- East Bridgford and surrounds to the north and northwest of Bingham
- The Cropwells and surrounds to the south and southwest of Bingham
- The villages east of Bingham of which Aslockton-Whatton is by far the largest and although more disparate in residential layout, is approaching the size of East Bridgford and Cropwell Bishop, respectively

The challenge of four single member wards is noted due to the 'too greater' size of Cropwell (as above) and East Bridgford (with Newton and Shelford), respectively. However, it must be highlighted that the community identities in the villages bordering the A52 to the east of Bingham are highly distinct from those to the West.

The size of Cropwell Bishop and East Bridgford in addition to their equal proximity to Radcliffe on Trent (and in the case of the former, Cotgrave) relative to Bingham, combined with their proximity to the A46, gives them a more immediate relationship to the Nottingham Metropolitan area (of which Radcliffe and Cotgrave are part) as well as northeast/southwest transport links between Newark and Leicester, providing a completely different context for electoral issues likely to concern the villages east of Bingham.

For example, in terms of transport, the priorities for the villages east of Bingham are:

- Increasing the frequency of bus services – not an issue in the well served Cropwell and East Bridgford west of Bingham, due to their greater proximity to the Nottingham metro area with direct bus services to and from the Nottingham and West Bridgford
- Maintenance of our train services to Aslockton and Elton & Orston stations – Cropwell and East Bridgford are equally served by Bingham and Radcliffe so again not an issue for them
- Safe access onto the A52 east of Bingham – again this is not an issue for East Bridgford and Cropwell as their key access points onto the main arterial roads – the A52 (west of Bingham), and the A46 – are safely served by roundabouts and traffic light junctions. All the villages East of Bingham mainly access the highway network through junctions between rural roads and the A52. Without traffic control measures like roundabouts and traffic lights, the relative priority of the safety of these A52 junctions is extremely high for our villages, whereas the issue for East Bridgford, the Cropwells and the areas west of Bingham is more of growing congestion around the A52/A46 (and A6097 for East Bridgford) roundabout, slip road and traffic-lit junctions.

This is just one issue that demonstrates a clear community of interest not shared with the Cropwells or areas that access arterial routes primarily via the A46 or Saxondale roundabout, to the west of Bingham.

There is also the issue of the Cranmer group of villages and dividing Aslockton-Whatton from its neighbouring villages north of the A52: Orston, Thoroton and particularly Scarrington which has a very strong relationship with Aslockton in terms of utilising its local facilities such as the Cranmer Arms pub, Aslockton train station, Archbishop Cranmer Primary School and the newly opened local convenience store, 'The Larder'.

Indeed the recent growth of Aslockton and the opening of new village shop means that with Whatton, it is forming a third 'eastern sub-centre' in the villages surrounding Bingham in North East Rushcliffe, and therefore should not be combined with the 'south-western' sub-centre, Cropwell Bishop, some 4.5 miles away.

As such Whatton and Aslockton Parish Councils we would like to make the following joint proposal.

1. Place Upper Saxondale in the 2 member East Bridgford Ward. Upper Saxondale, due to its closer proximity to both Radcliffe-on-Trent and Bingham does not depend on either Cropwell Bishop or East Bridgford for services, but in character and historic development it has many similarities with Newton – both largely new villages built around a now disused formerly major employment site and trying to build focal points for their community identity, both highly dependent on Saxondale roundabout for road access, and both very close to the A52 west of Bingham and the A46.
2. Create a single member Cropwell ward with Cropwell Bishop and Cropwell Butler parishes, which, with the removal of Upper Saxondale, would have an acceptable level of electors per councillor.

3. Place Scarrington, Thoroton and Orston in a new single-member ward with Aslockton and the other villages east of Bingham (Elton-on-the-Hill, Granby, Tithby and Wiverton Hall parishes and the northern section of Langar cum Barnstone parish), ensuring East Bridgford maintains an acceptable variance as a 2 member ward, as it absorbs Upper Saxondale. IF Aslockton's variance is now too high then consider moving smaller more westerly parts of the ward such as Wiverton Hall and Tithby into Cropwell ward (they are too small to offset the loss of Upper Saxondale) and/or the Barnstone part of Langar cum Barnstone parish into Nevile and Langar ward in South East Rushcliffe. However, if Aslockton's variance is too low then perhaps consider including Shelton and/or Hawksworth as well, in the retained Cranmer ward's new boundaries.

This East/North-Northwest/South-Southwest split for North East Rushcliffe's rural wards would still provide acceptable electoral equality while better reflecting community identity and recognising the relative difference in urbanisation, population density and transport infrastructure between the Western and Eastern parts of Northeast Rushcliffe.

The feeling of our parish councils is that the 'excellent evidence' provided by Upper Saxondale Residents Association in the first round consultation and has had a disproportionate impact on the considerations by LGBCE and that efforts to address their concerns has created two monstrously large North and South wards when in fact the significant division in community identity in North East Rushcliffe is East/West not North/South.

We are also conscious that we do not have access to all the data on the electoral register so whilst the exact details of our proposal may require some modification, our view is that in principle, the division of the villages surrounding Bingham proposed by Aslockton Parish Council and Whatton-in-the-Vale parish council, is the right one, and the New Electoral Arrangements for this part of Rushcliffe Borough should reflect that.