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Mr N. Carter
West Berkshire District Council
Council Offices
Market Street
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Cc Claire Ockwell, Electoral Services Manager

15th September 2020

Dear Mr Carter,

Greenham Parish Council would like to address the issue of the Sandleford Ward and the gross imbalance of elector numbers between Sandleford (7 electors, 5 Councillors) and the "Common" Ward (the rest of Greenham with over 4,000 electors, with 10 Councillors).

This imbalance primarily results from the WBDC Planning Department reporting to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in December 2017 that the Sandleford development was about to start and that there would be about 1,000 voters living there by 2023. The creation of Wash Common District Ward, including that part of Greenham west of A339, meant that a new parish ward for Sandleford had to be created. It was given 5 of the 15 councillors comprising this parish council on that basis.

-Two months later, planners recognised that the Sandleford development was seriously delayed and it is now very unlikely that any new homes will be built before 2025. However LGBCE was unable or unwilling to amend its proposals.

Looking ahead to the local elections in 2023, Sandleford potentially will still have a small number of electors, whilst the vast majority of Greenham voters would be proportionally, under represented when compared to the Sandleford Ward. The current prediction of Planning is that no new homes are now required from the Sandleford Park site until well after 2023. Therefore it is unlikely that the number of electors in Sandleford Ward will increase significantly until 2027 local elections.

Without those five Sandleford candidates, Greenham parish electors can only potentially elect 10 councillors for Common Ward, since it is unlikely that such a small number of electors will even nominate more than one or two of their five allocated parish representatives, even it were allowed. In 2019, only one candidate was nominated for 5 places on the council and we are still seeking people to be co-opted to make up the deficiency. This will almost certainly be repeated in 2023 unless the warding is adjusted: only 10 Common Ward councillors will be elected, thereby jeopardising the prospects of this council achieving Power of General Competence. Sandleford Ward would probably be again faced with unfilled vacancies, to be filled by co-option.

To rectify this situation Greenham Parish Council requests that a Community Governance Review is undertaken by the District Council. Greenham Parish Council is keen to be involved in this process.

The Local Government and Public Involvement and Health Act 2007 outlines a number of obligations on principal authorities. The 2007 act was intended to streamline the process of making changes to parish boundaries and electoral arrangements:

- It places 'a duty on principal authorities to have regard to the need to secure that any community governance for the area under review, reflects the identities and interests of the local community in that area, and that it is effective and convenient; relevant considerations which influence judgements against these two principal criteria include the impact on community cohesion, and the size, population and boundaries of the proposed area'.
- The Act also states that it is important that principal councils seek to address parish boundary anomalies when they arise. This point can be applied here as changing the boundary (creating Wash Common District Ward) has resulted in the clear anomaly for Sandleford ward.
- When considering the criteria identified in the 2007 Act, principal councils should consider a number of influential factors, including the impact of community governance arrangements on community cohesion and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish. The current arrangements in Greenham Parish do not meet these criteria, as the number of councillors within the Sandleford ward is not proportionate to the population of that ward.
- Community cohesion is about local communities where people should feel they have a stake in the society, and in the local area where they live by having the opportunity to influence decisions affecting their lives. This may include what type of community governance arrangements they want in their local area. Greenham parishioners could feel that their stake in society is lessened by the reduced number of Councillors due to the boundary changes.

One suggestion for remedying this situation is for the creation of another parish ward, comprising the existing GB2 polling district and called Racecourse Ward. With the Newbury Racecourse development (1500 homes) nearing completion already and having a distinct identity of its own (as well as different tenure arrangements to most of Greenham parish), we feel that it merits having its own representatives at parish level. In addition, there are significant numbers of new homes being created from office conversions in Hambridge Lane (e.g. Overbridge Square).

A new Racecourse Ward could justifiably have four parish councillors, leaving Sandleford Ward with just one.

The Council looks forward to hearing from you so that the matter can be discussed in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Blake
Clerk to Greenham Parish Council