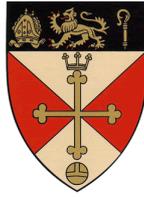


Malmesbury Town Council

(ENGLAND'S OLDEST BOROUGH - CHARTER GRANTED 880)



Cllr F Vandelli
Mayor of Malmesbury

THE TOWN HALL
MALMESBURY
WILTSHIRE
SN16 9BZ

Telephone: (01666) 822143
Facsimile: (01666) 826166
E-mail: administration@malmesbury.gov.uk

March 27th 2019

The Review Officer (Wiltshire),
Local Government Boundary Commission for England,
1st Floor, Windsor House, 50 Victoria Street,
London SW1H 0TL
reviews@lgbce.org.uk

cc: Wiltshire Council Electoral Review Committee committee@wiltshire.gov.uk

Dear Sir or Madam

THE PROPOSED BOUNDARIES OF THE NEW MALMESBURY AND SHERSTON DIVISIONS OF WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

I write as the Mayor of Malmesbury on behalf of our Town Council. The electoral boundaries of our Town Council are contiguous to the existing built area contained in the current Malmesbury Wiltshire Council Division

We strongly oppose the Commission's proposal to remove the historic, cultural, commercial and civic centre of Malmesbury and our town centre residents from the Malmesbury Division and their location into the Sherston Division. We oppose this proposal on the following grounds:

Principles of good governance

Good governance enables clarity for residents, businesses, community organisations and local institutions to relate to and work effectively with their town/parish councils and in turn their Wiltshire Councillor.

Malmesbury Town Council enjoys such a constructive relationship with both our former and current Wiltshire Councillors. This has enabled us to raise matters clearly and speedily relating to planning, highways, parking, education, licensing, young people and grant funding with our Wiltshire Councillor and to receive a response from them.

Consequently our Wiltshire Councillor has been able to speak with clarity on the concerns of this Town Council as they relate to Wiltshire Council.

The creation of key responsibilities for the centre of our town for a different councillor to address these concerns will undermine this cohesion and contradict the principle of good local government.

Community Cohesion

The whole of the current, built area of Malmesbury has been represented as a cohesive community at the first principal tier of local government for as long as any resident can remember. Initially we were our own Rural District Council. Its abolition saw the creation of North Wiltshire District Council

(NWDC). Again the whole built area of Malmesbury was represented on NWDC on boundaries contiguous with those of our Town Council.

The more recent abolition of NWDC and creation of Wiltshire Unitary Authority in 2009 saw a single member Division formed that was once more contiguous with our Town Council boundaries.

Your proposals break this long-established link that has served our community cohesion and good local governance principles so well for many decades.

The area you seek to remove from Malmesbury is at the heart of our cultural activities which are based in our Town Hall, Museum, Market Cross and High Street. All these locations, coupled with our Abbey and Cloister Gardens, are the locations for the vast majority of our main public and civic events, including our Carnival.

This area is also the spiritual heart of our town. It includes Malmesbury Abbey, the location of which has been a centre for the Christian faith since Saxon times, and St Aldhelm's Catholic Church. The Abbey is the location to which we as Town Councillors process from our Town Hall to bless our Mayor and remember the fallen on Remembrance Sunday. Your proposal also removes from the Malmesbury Division the Memorial Gates that are the location where we lay wreathes on that special Sunday morning.

Malmesbury is believed to be the oldest borough in England. It has an historic and continuing governance body created in Saxon times. The Warden and Freemen of Malmesbury ran our town prior to introduction of local government in the 19th century. Your proposal removes from the Malmesbury Division both their medieval Court House and their meeting hall and office, so severing an historic local government connection that has lasted for over 150 years and ending their formal link to Wiltshire Division that carries the historic name of Malmesbury.

Our secondary school, Malmesbury School, will sit in your proposed Division of Malmesbury. But, under your proposals, many Malmesbury parents of the children attending that school who live in our town centre will reside in your Sherston Division.

Our main primary school is Malmesbury Church of England Primary School. It will sit in your proposed Malmesbury Division. But many of the parents of children attending the school who live in our town centre will not. In addition Malmesbury Abbey with its direct link to the Primary School will not, as under your proposals it will be in the Sherston Division. Our second primary school, St Joseph's Catholic School will join the Abbey in your proposed Sherston Division while its children will go to Malmesbury School in the Malmesbury Division.

The Malmesbury Town Team formed to promote the commercial life of our High Street and town centre has on its Management Committee a representative from this Town Council. There is also a place for the Malmesbury Wiltshire Councillor. That link will be broken by your proposal. Indeed it will have to be the Member representing the Sherston Division, as you propose it, who will sit on the Committee as they will represent the High Street, Abbey, our main hotels, cafes, most of our pubs and our visitor attractions. Yet the vast majority of the residents who are the regular customers of these Malmesbury facilities will live in the Malmesbury Division. Indeed your proposal even transfers Malmesbury Town Hall to the Sherston Division!

In addition to all of these difficulties, your proposal will see a significant number of Malmesbury residents no longer represented by the Malmesbury Wiltshire Councillor. Instead they will become a relatively small part of the Sherston Division whose Wiltshire Councillor will represent two larger parishes in Sherston itself and Malmesbury St Paul Without Parish. Inevitably and quite rightly their concerns and meetings will attract the prime attention of the Sherston Division Councillor.

Our Alternative Proposals for the Malmesbury and Sherston Divisions

For these reasons of community cohesion and good governance we respectfully ask that you do not proceed with your proposal. Rather, we seek to retain the existing and currently built area of the Malmesbury Division. This would reunite both sides of Tetbury Hill and retain Tetbury Hill Gardens in our Malmesbury Division. As such this is a variation to the original Wiltshire Council proposal and meets the concern you raised in your consultation document.

We appreciate that this will add approximately 54 voters and so push the total electorate in our Malmesbury Division to 11% above the average-sized Wiltshire Division. We know that this exceeds the Commission's clear preference for no Division being more than 10% above this figure. However we note that your own proposals already has a Division of 11% above justified by community cohesion. We would respectfully request the same exemption should be applied for the same reason and in the interests of good and effective local governance as argued above.

Our proposal is also in line with the response of Wiltshire Council. As such, we and they believe that it is the new and yet to be built community of Backbridge Farm that should join the new Sherston Division.

This new and discrete community will have no direct road link to Malmesbury town. Its character as a community will be similar to the other distinct areas around our town that form the vast majority of Malmesbury St Paul Without Parish. That in turn forms half of the residents of the new Sherston Division.

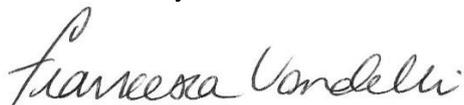
The new Backbridge Farm area will remain within the boundaries of our Town Council area. Thus it will become a new Ward electing their own representatives to Malmesbury Town Council. These representatives will be able to provide a governance link to the Wiltshire Councillor for the Sherston Division.

Conclusion

We believe our proposal meets the requirements of electoral equality for both the new Malmesbury and Sherston Divisions. The proposal will provide strong and continuing community cohesion while maintaining good and effective local governance arrangements for this Town Council with the Wiltshire Councillor for Malmesbury and also for their Sherston Division counterpart through the new Town Councillors for the Backbridge Farm Ward.

We respectfully ask for the Commission to accept and approve our proposal to retain the current built area of the existing Malmesbury Division in the new Malmesbury Division and to the location of the yet to be built, discrete Backbridge Farm development in the new Sherston Division.

Yours faithfully



Councillor F Vandelli
Mayor of Malmesbury