

Proposal to Boundary Commission - for a North West Ward

Comment - As stated in The NFDC Submission/Effective and Convenient Local Government, the target electorate for Fordingbridge and North West is 3,091. At present the total electorate for Fordingbridge, Downland and Forest North West is 10,279, if Ellingham Harbridge and Ibsley (EH&I) electorate total of 1006 is removed the total is 9273 which gives an average of 3091 for 3 councillors - so the decision to remove EH&I to a Ringwood ward seems to have already been made by New Forest District Council without any consultation, this is a matter of concern to parish councillors. The 5 parishes do not believe that sharing a ward and district councillor with an area of a local town, or being split for expediency, to make preferred numbers fit, is in their best interests.

- Parish councillors became aware that NFDC were proposing to eliminate Forest NW ward and merge its parishes and those of Downland with with Ringwood (EH&I) or Fordingbridge in mid January so there has been no time to organise a consultation with the electorates to provide the required evidence of the common interests, identities and concerns of the parishes proposing this boundary change, however, parish councillors are always available and accessible, they do know their residents, share their way of life. their pride in their communities and their worries and concerns.

The Boundary Change Proposal

Figures based on the total electorate of 10,279, which should be the starting point for a consultation, and 3 district councillors mean an average of 3426. The proposal is for a NW Ward of 5 parishes., Ellingham Harbridge & Ibsley (EH&I), Hyde, Godshill, Woodgreen, Hale, The combined number of electors in the parishes of the proposed ward total 3,132, although below the average Parish Councillors consider this sufficient to warrant a Ward and a District Councillor who would represent a rural, scattered, geographically large ward, many parts of which have limited mobile phone or broadband coverage. and limited or no access to public transport. While it is understood that there is no provision in legislation for variance in electoral ratio for rural areas, the Commission Technical Guidance 2014/Rurality 4.65 states "there may be exceptions where local characteristics, including topography, lead to an acceptance of a particular variance in electoral ratio for one or more wards" Parish councillors hope and request that an exception can be considered for their proposed ward.

The boundary of the proposed ward is the same as the existing NW ward consisting of EH&I, Hyde, and Godshill, it would be extended to the north to include Woodgreen parish and Hale parish. The 5 parishes lie mainly or partly within the New Forest National Park and within the highly protected Western Escarpment lying along the National Park western boundary.

The Ellingham and Harbridge areas of E.H.& Ibsley parish are situated straight across the A338 from Ibsley, 3 villages/hamlets were combined in 1974 and formed the parish, there is a successful working and social bond linking these parish areas and all 3 wish to be together in a new NW Ward.

Links Geographically the parishes all have access to the A338; within the proposed ward all 5 parishes form a linked chain and it is possible to travel on Forest roads from the south edge of the proposed ward to the northern edge without leaving the proposed ward boundary - and not travelling through adjacent wards (4.53, 4.71 –Technical Guidance).

Interests/Identities The 5 parish communities have similar local social occasions held in village halls or outdoors, they share and support each others' events and efforts, The residents of the 5 parishes enjoy a rural lifestyle, they live within a working forest and respect that it is a source of local employment, they are aware that they share a unique environment and that living in the N F, or in close proximity to it, is a privilege, they also realise they are fortunate in having the convenience and services of town facilities a few miles away, but they do not want to be merged into a town ward with Fordingbridge or Ringwood,

Residents of the 5 parishes have the same concerns, priorities and responsibilities as each other but they are not the same as those of the towns. For example within the National Park residents accept the responsibility of protecting the conservation area, with its many sssi areas and of encouraging and advising visitors and tourists to do the same; they are aware that grazing livestock are vital to the maintenance of the mosaic of the Forest landscape and fully support commoners and commoning - they also share their space with the roaming livestock - ponies, donkeys, cattle and pigs - which have right of way on the roads and lanes but can be unpredictable; within the National Park strict planning policies apply to buildings and land, new dwellings are only permitted as replacements or within (non local) designated villages.

Parish residents inside and outside of the Park share the same rural conditions, for example: lack of regular road maintenance and many unadopted tracks which are prone to flooding, and can become impassable very quickly, there are few drains so constant ditch clearing is essential, there is no mains drainage - sewage is dealt with by septic tanks or cess pits, no mains gas, lack of affordable housing, increasing rural crime especially theft of farm, garden and equine equipment, rare police presence; the safety of a scattered community and that with an elderly age demographic the lack of public transport, poor broadband and mobile phone reception in many areas. can lead to social isolation. .

Effective – As well as the usual constituency role of advising on and helping with NFDC policies and services etc. a proposed new NW Forest ward district councillor would effectively represent 5 rural parishes, comprised of scattered hamlets and settlements, with a total of 3,000+ electors, it must be pointed out that many residents are elderly and some do not use computers, even when connection to the internet is possible, so communication/ consultation cannot always be done by convenient email. On behalf of residents a District Councillor would liaise with parish councils, local Town Councils, New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council, (there are also boundaries with Dorset and Wiltshire), the National Park Authority, the Commoners' Association, the Verderers and also with other agencies involved in the conservation area, for example, Forestry England and Natural England, this would be efficient, effective and convenient representation for the 5 parishes and for the District Council.