



Formal Response of Barton under Needwood Parish Council

to

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Draft Recommendations Report dated June 2020

New Electoral Arrangements for East Staffordshire Borough
Council

Response Summary

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has undertaken a review of the current electoral arrangements for East Staffordshire Borough Council. The results of the review and draft recommendations are contained in a document entitled "New Electoral Arrangements for East Staffordshire Borough Council Draft Recommendations" dated June 2020.

This document has been published and the Commission is inviting comments on the review and its resultant recommendations. The Commission states that it has "an open mind about its draft recommendations". It states that if interested parties do not think its "recommendations are right for East Staffordshire it wants to hear alternative proposals for a different pattern of wards".

Barton under Needwood Parish Council (BUNPC) has considered the draft recommendations and its position is set out in this formally approved response.

It is noted that in undertaking the review, the Commission states that it has three main considerations

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

It states its "task is to strike the best balance between these three considerations when making its recommendations".

Having reviewed the report and its draft recommendations BUNPC is supportive of the considerations as stated. However, based on the report, BUNPC considers that the Commission has, for whatever reason, failed to strike the required balance. The report contains no substantial evidence that the Commission has understood or taken account of the clear and demonstrable community interests and identity in respect of the 4 parish councils which comprise Needwood Ward. On this basis, BUNPC objects to the proposals which would break up Needwood Ward and separate Barton and Wychnor from Dunstall and Tatenhill.

BUNPC is open to alternative proposals which would improve electoral equality providing the community identity of the current Needwood Ward and other adjacent wards are respected. BUNPC is willing to work with other parties, both other parishes, East Staffordshire Borough Council and its councillors and the Commission, in order to modify the recommendations to achieve an acceptable balance between the three considerations.

Introduction

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has undertaken a review of the current electoral arrangements for East Staffordshire Borough Council. The results of the review and draft recommendations are contained in a document entitled "New Electoral Arrangements for East Staffordshire Borough Council Draft Recommendations" dated June 2020. If approved by Parliament and implemented, the recommendations would result in changes to the current Needwood Ward of which BUNPC forms a part. Changes would also be made to the adjacent Wards of Branston and Yoxall.

The current electoral arrangements are that Needwood Ward consists of the parishes of

- Barton under Needwood (population 4,225 2011 census)
- Dunstall (population 209 2011 census)
- Tatenhill and Rangemore (population 2079 2011 census)
- Wychnor (population 70 2011 census)

Needwood is represented by 2 borough councillors

Yoxall Ward consists of the parishes of

- Hoar Cross (population 250 2011 census)
- Newborough (population 476 2011 census)
- Yoxall (population 1,895 2011 census)

Yoxall is represented by 1 borough councillor

- Branston Ward and Branston Parish form the same area and it is represented by 3 borough councillors (population 4,225 2011 census)

Under the draft recommendations the following changes would take place.

- Barton under Needwood and Wychnor are removed from Needwood Ward and joined with Yoxall to form a new Barton and Yoxall Ward with 2 councillors.
- Tatenhill and Dunstall remain in Needwood Ward but separated from Barton under Needwood and joined with Branston to form Branston and Needwood Ward with 3 councillors.
- Hoar Cross is moved to Bagots Ward and Newborough is moved to Crown Ward.

The Commission's draft recommendations make clear that the primary driver for change of current electoral arrangements is to ensure a return to electoral equality by 2025.

BUNPC has reviewed the draft recommendations report. Liaison has also taken place both with the current Needwood Ward county and district council members, current Needwood parish councils, Yoxall Parish Council and Branston Ward, both individually and in one combined meeting attended by some of the above.

In formulating its response to the draft recommendations BUNPC has considered both the report and the views of others. However, the formal response provided in this document is that of the parish council. It is assumed that other parties will make their own responses.

BUNPC response is that it does not support the recommendations on the basis that they are not in compliance with the Commissions stated requirement to strike the best balance between the three considerations being

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

In paragraph 19 the report states with reference to electoral equality "We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for our wards. However the draft recommendations make virtually no reference to the community interests of Needwood Ward and the strong links between Barton, Dunstall and Tatenhill.

Whilst BUNPC had been made aware of the ESBC electoral arrangements review, it did not respond to the first consultation on warding arrangements since it is satisfied with the current Needwood Ward arrangements and no alternatives proposed. As the draft recommendations report notes Tatenhill and Rangemore Parish Council did make comment providing in some detail, a range of community links with Barton and Dunstall and emphasising the rural nature of their parish area. These community links appear to be dismissed in favour of electoral equality.

In order to assist the commission to understand and take proper account of community interests, BUNPC sets out in this response details of significant and multiplicity of links between Barton, Dunstall and Tatenhill and Rangemore. Clearly Wychnor and to a limited extent Yoxall also have community links but since if the recommendations are accepted they either remain with or would join Barton it is not necessary to provide a similar level of detail.

Whilst proper consideration of community interests and identity remain a key concern, BUNPC also provides some observations on the other two considerations which may assist the commission in modifying the draft proposals so as to ensure that its stated task "to strike the best balance between these three considerations when making its recommendations" is met.

Needwood Ward Community Interests and Common Identity

In draft recommendations report paragraph 84 Community Identity, the commission pose three criteria these being

- Community groups and bodies which represent the area
- Community identity
- Identifiable natural or constructed boundaries

In this section BUNPC provide evidence in support of these criteria which bind Barton, Dunstall and Tatenhill and Rangemore Parishes

Geography

There is a very clear natural physical boundary in the river Trent which separates ESBC from adjacent district councils and forms a ward boundary for Needwood and within Burton, Branston.

Elsewhere in general existing roads form boundaries with other wards. For example, the A515 main road forms a boundary between Needwood Ward and Yoxall over some distance whilst the B5017 secondary road forms a boundary for Needwood Ward with the adjacent Anslow and Hanbury Wards. There are some locations where other minor C roads do not form the boundary, but these are limited and assumed to be based on former parish extents.

Physically the ward is divided into two distinct landforms these being

- Relatively flat land adjacent to the River Trent and which in geological timescales has formed the river flood plain
- Undulating hills located to the north of the flood plain extent.

The undulating hills were originally forested as part of Needwood forest but in the eighteen hundreds the extent of forest was drastically reduced. In recent times the extent of forest has significantly reduced. Areas across all three parishes are being reforested as part of the National Forest, supported by landowners and residents. Other areas remain in open space and agricultural use.

To the north east the hills form a clear barrier which visually separates Tatenhill from Burton and the new Branston Locks development located on the former floodplain within Branston Ward. Battlestead Hill forms a partly forested ridge with a height of approximately 50 m above the former floodplain.

Transport links in the form of the Trent and Mersey canal, A38 strategic road and the Burton - Birmingham railway run in parallel within the former floodplain through Wychnor, Barton and Dunstall. One secondary road the B5016 passes through Barton under Needwood and provides a link between the A38 and the A515 at Yoxall. Yoxall is some 3 miles away in the adjacent River Swarbourne valley beyond the hills

Elsewhere Needwood ward is served by a local minor C road network which provides good local links between villages, hamlets and more isolated settlements.

With the exception of a number of properties in Barton and Dunstall that front onto the A38 most settlements and individual properties are located to the north west of the former floodplain and transport links at a point where land rises in elevation to form undulating hills.

The main settlements are at Barton under Needwood, Rangemore and Tatenhill. Other local hamlets and groups of properties are spread across the ward together with individual properties. Within Dunstall there are 3 areas of properties centred on the A38, around Dunstall Hall and its estate and at Dunstall Cross.

There are two large estates, Dunstall and Rangemore. Dunstall estate occupies land both within Dunstall and Barton parishes and includes land and properties within Barton village. Most parts of Dunstall Parish are closer to Barton under Needwood village than the more outlying parts of Barton Parish.

Economic links

ESBC adopted Local Plan assigns Barton under Needwood the status of Tier 1 strategic village. Strategic villages are defined as those that meet rural needs by providing a good range of facilities and services to their own populations and a wider rural catchment area. The rural catchment area surrounding Barton is basically Needwood Ward.

ESBC defines facilities in the following terms

Primary Services	Secondary Services	Additional Services
Bus service suitable for daily commute Post Office General store Community building Doctors Pharmacy Primary school Public recreational facilities	Public house Cafe/restaurant/takeaway Place of worship Fresh food retail Other Use Class A1 shop Dentist Police station Bank/building society Library service Private recreational facilities Preschool/ Nursery Secondary school Members recreational facilities	Opticians Petrol Station Car repair Garage ATM Recycling facilities Telephone box Post Box Members Clubs (not including the recreational facilities)

With the exception of a bank, for which the Post Office is a substitute, Barton provides all primary and secondary services across Needwood Ward including for Dunstall, Rangemore, Tatenhill and to an extent Yoxall. Some of the listed additional services are also provided.

The police station occupies the same site as the local fire station which serves the Needwood area..

Schools

Within Needwood Ward primary schools are located in Barton under Needwood, Thomas Russell Infant and Junior in Barton, and Rangemore, All Saints. Children from across Needwood attend these schools. Some Barton Children attend All Saints and children from Dunstall and Tatenhill attend Thomas Russell.

John Taylor High School is a secondary school with a traditional catchment of Needwood Ward and to an extent other local areas.

Thomas Russell Infant , John Taylor High School and All Saints form part of the John Taylor Multi-Academy Trust. The trust also includes the two infant schools within Yoxall Ward. In recognition of

increasing demand for secondary schools, the trust has recently opened a new school, John Taylor Free School. This is located within Tatenhill and Rangemore Parish within Needwood Ward.

Children from across Needwood Ward thus attend common schools and the schools provide community links and focus, both through education, social and support activities.

Religion

There are four church of England parishes within Needwood Ward these being

- St James Barton
- St Mary's Dunstall
- St Michael Tatenhill
- All Saints Rangemore

The first three form a joint benefice which means they are linked under a common ministry and share facilities and worship in a range of activity. This promotes community links across Needwood Ward.

There are also churches of other denominations including Roman Catholic and Methodist located in Barton which serve the wider Needwood area.

Sports and Leisure

Barton under Needwood provides a centre for sports and leisure for Needwood Ward and surrounding areas. With the exception of one public house located in Tatenhill all other public houses are located in Barton. Barton also has a number of cafes, tea rooms and restaurants.

Barton Marina located alongside the canal provides a tourist centre for Needwood Ward and further afield and includes a cinema, lakeside and woodland walks etc.

Holland Sports and Social Club is a facility providing a wide range of sports both for children and adults. Team members for various sports are drawn from across the Needwood Ward.

Barton Fishing Pond is used by local people across Needwood Ward with day tickets available to the public. Residents of Barton and Dunstall are entitled to free tickets.

A range of activities are run from Barton Village Hall and used by people across Needwood Ward.

The above activities are not fully comprehensive but demonstrate the community links between Barton, Dunstall and Tatenhill and Rangemore.

Charitable Links

Barton and Dunstall Key Trust is a charity providing for the communities of Barton under Needwood and Dunstall. It provides grants for

- individuals of any age in need through illness, disability, bereavement or accident.
- young people with their extracurricular activities.
- community organisations with major projects.

The Henry Warford Charity is based on Tatenhill Parish but also provides grants for people and organisations in Barton under Needwood and Dunstall Parishes. It provides similar grants to the Barton and Dunstall Key Trust but with a greater focus on welfare, safety and social exclusion.

These charities bring the people of Needwood Ward closer together as a community.

Common Interests and Concerns

There are common interests and concerns across the Needwood Ward community. In particular there are concerns regarding the retention of the rural nature of Needwood, particularly at Tatenhill, given planned development on greenfield land within the neighbouring Branston Ward.

Barton under Needwood is concerned at constant developer proposals to build large estates in the land surrounding the village.

Whilst currently the ESBC local plan contains a presumption against anything other than minor infill development within Needwood, there is a concern that in the event that Dunstall and Tatenhill and Rangemore are merged with Branston, it is much more likely that this would change, impacting on the rural nature of the area.

Other common concerns include the impact of gravel extract within the former River Trent floodplain and ensuring appropriate restoration of land.

The impact of the A38 on Barton and Dunstall due to traffic noise and air quality are also of concern.

Barton and Tatenhill have both suffered from flooding problems in recent years and are sharing expertise and knowledge to help alleviate flooding.

Borough Councillor Representation

The draft recommendations include for a reduction in the number of borough councillors from 39 to 36. This started with an assumed reduction of 2 councillors but following attempts to balance numbers to produce electoral equality, in report paragraph 29 the Commission state that they concluded that a council size of 36 councillors would offer the best electoral arrangements in terms of electoral equality, community identity and effective and convenient local government.

The basis of this conclusion and evidence on which it is based is not contained within the report.

Whilst BUNPC does not have a particular view on an appropriate number of councillors required to ensure effective and convenient local government, it considers that the commission should provide sufficient information to demonstrate that its conclusion can be justified.

BUNPC wishes to make the point that if its substantiated concerns that the draft recommendations are not acceptable because the balance between electoral equality and community identity has not been achieved, this would reopen the consideration of electoral equality. Since on the initial consideration of evidence the commission concluded that a reduction of 2 councillors was appropriate, in reopening its consideration and balancing of electoral equality with community identity, there is a reasonable justification to have 37 councillors if this helps to achieve the balance. This also reduces the chance of a decision being made requiring the chairman's casting vote.

Electoral Equality

The draft recommendations report paragraph 22 defines electoral equality as being when the number of electors per councillor in a ward is within 10% of the average for the authority. BUNPC notes that this definition does not appear in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 thus arguably it is not a statutory requirement.

In its guidance the commission state that criteria for triggering a review include

- a) If one ward has an electorate of +/-30% from the average electorate for the authority
- b) If 30% of all wards have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.
- b) It follows that a council can have a ward with a variance of +/-10% from the average electorate for the authority.

it is not a requirement that all Wards must have an electorate of +/-10% from the average electorate without triggering a review. Thus, in order to achieve the commission stated required balance between electoral equality and community identity/interest it is permissible to vary from the +/-10% electoral equality. In the case of ESBC review it is noted that the electoral equality numbers are based on assumptions for population in 2025 and this is an estimate not a fixed number.

In report paragraph 51 the Commission note that one option put forward by the council was to retain Needwood Ward but add Yoxall Parish Council area with 3 councillors. The reason that this was discounted was that it would result in a -15% variance breaching the +/- 10% target.

In Appendix A the report provides data on ward electorate based on the draft recommendations for actual values from 2019 and estimated values for 2025 as shown below

New Proposed Ward	Councillors	Electorate 2019	Variance	Electorate 2025	Variance
Barton & Yoxall	2	5,593	+16%	5,445	+7%
Branston & Needwood	3	6,239	-14%	8,089	+6%

This shows that electorate in Barton under Needwood and Yoxall remains static and Branston, Dunstall and Tatenhill increases. Based on current ESBC planning policy it is clear that the increase will be within Branston.

If the electorate of Dunstall and Tatenhill is considered to be approximate to the 2,288 population from the 2011 census, and it remains static then it is similar that the projected increase in Branston population. In 2025 Dunstall and Tatenhill would represent under 30%

of the proposed ward electorate. There are clear differences in the needs and wishes of rural and urban electorates and this merger creates obvious tensions which will create difficulties for councillors in representing their electorate.

BUNPC considers that it should be obvious that the merging of rural Dunstall and Tatenhill and Rangemore with urban Branston which is subject to major expansion at Branston Leas and Branston Locks does not respect the community identity/interest criteria, even without the evidence of the community links with Barton under Needwood.

Summary and Conclusion

Barton under Needwood Parish Council considers that on the basis of the draft recommendations report, the required balance between the three considerations set out in report paragraph 5 has not been achieved. The community identity and interests between the Needwood Ward parish councils have either not been recognised or have been sacrificed in order to achieve electoral equality across ESBC.

In this response BUNPC has provided details which demonstrate the wide ranging community links, common interests between Barton under Needwood, Dunstall, Tatenhill and Rangemore. BUNPC does not support the recommendations and does not wish to see the breakup of the existing Needwood Ward. It is somewhat ironic that the only parish council name which contains Needwood in its title would be removed from a changed Needwood Ward.

BUNPC does recognise the equal validity of considerations of electoral equality with community identity with community interest and identity. In consequence, if in order to achieve a fair balance of both considerations, Yoxall Parish Council is added to Needwood, this would be acceptable given the common rural identity and some minor links.

BUNPC recommends that the draft recommendations be reviewed and that interested parties work together to develop alternative proposals which deliver both electoral equality whilst respecting and retaining local community identity and interests.