

## **RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION, ENGLAND - REVIEW OF WARD BOUNDARIES FOR NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Introduction**

Kettering Town Council was created in 2021, as a consequence of local government re-organisation in Northamptonshire, and represents approximately 60,000 residents in the urban area of Kettering, including an area to the east of the town which is being developed as an urban extension.

The Town Council is of course interested in the outcome of this review, not only for its own sake as an instrument of democratic accountability, but because the NNC ward boundaries will provide the framework for any subsequent review of the Town Council's wards in due course.

The Town Council welcomes this review – the old Northamptonshire CC division boundaries were artificial and in many cases far too large to reflect communities of interest. They now cross town and parish boundaries as well as having become outdated by demographic change. The Council welcomes the Commission's objective of taking a fresh view of how wards should be created in preference to tweaking existing wards.

### **Principles**

#### **Alignment**

The Town of Kettering is currently represented by 15 councillors, 6 of whom also represent other villages with distinct identities and interests, which have little or nothing in common with those of the urban community of Kettering. Kettering is the largest single settlement within NNC's area and on the basis of the ratio of councillors to electors of 1-4038, should be represented by 11 councillors, whose wards should all fall within the existing boundary of Kettering Town, to ensure that

- a) there is clarity for the community about who represents Kettering on NNC
- b) Councillors are not pulled in different directions trying to represent quite different rural and urban communities

#### **Ward size**

The current blanket approach of all wards having three members (which in turn requires ward electorates of 12000+) has the de-merit of creating wards which fit no-one's concept

of community – the wards are too large for most of North Northamptonshire’s smaller communities and towns, and become artificial when applied to a larger urban area, when usually main roads are used to divide communities which have more in common than those they are brigaded with.

The Town Council advocates having smaller wards, with a mix of 1, 2 or 3 member wards, in order to better reflect communities of interest. Some of the Town Council’s existing wards are of a size which already fit the 1-4038 ratio as a single member or two member ward and in its search for new ward boundaries, the Commission should not overlook the longstanding boundaries within Kettering town which served the former Kettering Borough Council well.

#### Communities within Kettering

Kettering Town – not unusually for its size – is made up of distinct communities with separate identities. In broad terms, the Ise estate, the Grange and Avondale estates, Brambleside, the area of town west of the railway line and the several housing estates south of the town see themselves as having distinct identities and use local facilities. Hanwood Park will, over time also, no doubt, develop its own identity as community facilities develop there. For this reason, smaller single member wards would make more sense than large multi-member wards.

Areas of denser housing nearer the town centre may warrant larger wards as it is harder to distinguish community boundaries in this older part of town; in addition, the issues needing to be addressed in these older parts of town are likely to be more demanding of member time. Some multi-member wards will make it easier for community needs to be met if more than one councillor is available to share the workload.

The town centre has an increasing residential population and a proliferation of new flats. Often the town centre has been “tacked on” to another wards as a balancing act for equity of electorates. It would be better if this approach was not taken in future – the town centre also has a distinct set of needs and demands, which have intensified as a result of the increasing population, and a review which starts in the town centre and worked its way outwards would be preferable.

Finally, the Town Council has just adopted a Neighbourhood Plan for the Headlands area of town; a recognition in planning terms that this area also has a distinct identity. It is too small an area to be treated as a ward in itself but should not be sub-divided between wards. A map of the area is attached.

### **Technical matters**

The population projection on the Commission's website seems to show an electorate of about 43,000 for the area of the Town Council by 2028. This appears to be over-cautious and does not reflect the development pace of the urban extension of Hanwood Park – almost all of the remaining development will fall within Kettering Town area (currently Ise ward of NNC).

Compounding this issue is that the parish boundary of Kettering Town, as shown on the Commission's website, is inaccurate as it does not show the inclusion of land to the east of town which is the subject of the urban extension. On your map, this is shown as part of Cranford parish still. For reasons set out above, it is important that the right boundaries are used, both for the calculation of ward size and to reflect the objective of the urban extension, which is that it is an integral part of Kettering.

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