



Boxley

PARISH COUNCIL

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Boundary Commission Review Statement

Firstly Boxley Parish Council (BPC) is shocked that a proposal is being debated by the Democracy and General Purposes Committee, and a decision made before Boxley Parish Council has had a chance to make any comment or even be informed of the proposed changes to its boundaries. This proposal would have profound consequences for the Parish and yet it has not been brought to the attention of the Parish Council and the Parish Council has not been consulted or given any chance to comment on the proposals. We would like all of the information below considered at the meeting and the answers made part of the decision making process.

The final recommendations for Boxley Parish in the report on the Electoral Arrangements for MBC dated November 2022 stated that BPC should comprise of 15 Councillors made up as follows: Boxley Grove Green 5, Boxley North 6, Boxley South 2, Boxley South East 1 and Boxley Woodlands 1. As these Parish Wards lie wholly within the new Ward boundaries there is no need to alter the Parish boundary nor is it stated anywhere in this review what if any benefit would accrue to our residents from such a move.

BPC are strongly of the opinion that the boundary should remain as it stands for the reasons set out below:

Many of Boxley Parish Council's assets are in the South of the Parish. If the South of the Parish does not exist what becomes of these assets? By Law the Parish Council will not be able to pay to maintain these assets if they are no longer in the Parish but has long term commitments to them plus considerable financial investments. The Assets concerned are:

- Franklin Drive play area – 99 year lease taken out in 2020
- Weaving Diamond Jubilee Orchard – Play area, community orchard and recreational space – 125 year lease taken out in 2012.
- Vinters Valley Nature Reserve – BPC is a Custodian Trustee and donates a large sum towards the annual running costs. The nature reserve would not be able to fund itself without this grant.
- War memorial Grove Green – On BPC's asset register and maintained by BPC
- Grove Green Hall – Custodian Trustees
- Weaving Heath Nature Reserve – Volunteers that look after the Heath are supported by a Grant from the Parish Council

Dove Hill Allotments

There are 25 plot holders (the majority) who would become resident outside the new Parish boundary and would not be able to keep their plots as the Tenancy Agreement clearly states that they must live within the Parish. Would these plot holders be given another site in Grove Green/Weaving and compensated for the loss of the money invested in their current plots to enable them to set up their new ones? BPC will seek the advice and support of the National Allotment Society which is the leading national organisation upholding the interests and rights of the allotment community in the UK. They work with government at national and local levels, other organisations and landlords to provide, promote and preserve allotments for all. Their patron is HM The King who is a keen gardener and against the loss of such facilities. We have no need to remind MBC of the reaction, national outcry and media

coverage which happened in Bearsted last year when allotments were going to close for an extension to the Tennis Club.

Boxley Parish Burial Ground

Only residents that reside within the parish are allowed to be buried in the Parish Council burial ground. This means that current residents living in the South of the parish would not be able to be buried with loved ones already interred in the burial ground. Many residents who have long wanted to be buried in this burial ground would lose that right.

St Mary and All Saints Church – closed churchyard

BPC is responsible for the maintenance of the Closed Churchyard. The expense of this is considerable as it is a heritage asset and needs a lot of work to preserve and maintain it. This is financed by the Precept. If BPC loses more than half of its Precept income it will struggle to finance the upkeep of the churchyard without a massive increase in the Precept for its remaining residents. Would MBC take over this responsibility?

Village Halls

Weaving and Grove Green village halls have regularly relied on BPC grants to meet budgetary shortfalls arising from e.g. unexpected contingencies. These have been met from the Parish Precept. Where can they turn when this lifeline is but off?

Staff

There are 5 Staff members employed by BPC and there are concerns regarding which staff will be transferred to MBC. We would need to know all the details required by TUPE regulations such as work location, working hours, pension arrangements, date of salary payments etc so that a 'Statement of Measures' can be produced and given to the staff concerned. Many staff have split roles – how will this be managed by MBC? Do they expect that some staff will have their hours made up by working for both Boxley Parish and MBC? What is MBC's timetable for consultation with staff so that they have time to engage their union representatives. This situation is causing much stress amongst the staff and having a profound affect on their mental health.

Parish Councillors

4 will be affected by the proposed boundary change as they will no longer reside within the parish boundary. They are active elected volunteer members who do a lot for the whole Parish. A sad loss, especially as your report refers to concerns about recruiting Parish Councillors across the Borough.

The Parish Council has deep ties throughout the Parish which would be very hard to sever and could result in the loss of community assets for residents in the South of the Parish. For this reason Boxley Parish Council oppose the proposed changes and would like to see the boundaries stay as they are.

Your Community Governance Review (Parishes) Stage 2 Consultation sets out that a consultation is only legal when:

There is sufficient information to give 'intelligent consideration' and that 'conscientious consideration' must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made. Decision makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account. By failing to invite the Parish Council to present a statement to the Committee for consideration at this stage in the consultation process we query whether these requirements have been met.

For a proper consultation and considered response the Committee need to consider in full all the items raised in this statement and be able to have answers to them. We do not feel that the Officer analysis carried out did anything other than draw a line on a map and made no consideration of the implications of the changes on the assets and services provided by the Parish Council for residents or how it would work on a practical level.

The Parish Council would be happy with the proposed changes shown in Map 3C with the loss of Woodlands Ward and re-alignments shown around Orchard Drive (Map 3A) and the area in South East Ward in Map 9A.