

THE ALDEBURGH SOCIETY

(Registered Charity Number 262239)

Review Officer (East Suffolk)

24 August 2018

LGBCE

1st Floor Windsor House

50 Victoria Street

London SW1H 0TL via email to reviews@lgbce.org.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

East Suffolk District Council: Draft recommendations on the new electoral arrangements

Consultation Response

As chair of the Aldeburgh Society I set out below the Society's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations for East Suffolk District Council.

The recommendations follow the merger of Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils and conclude that Aldeburgh should become part of a ward known as Sandlings which would include Snape, Friston, Iken, Sudbourne, Orford and Gedgrave and be represented by one councillor.

The Aldeburgh Society believes this proposal and the knock on effects it would create will be damaging for Aldeburgh and should be rejected.

Aldeburgh used to have its own councillor. When the district council boundaries were changed to include Friston, Snape, Knodishall and Aldringham representation was increased to two councillors which meant that both could speak on Aldeburgh's behalf and that of a number of communities with a great deal of common interest. The present proposal to have only one Councillor for the diverse and geographically spread ward of Sandlings would lead to a distinctly serious gap in representation and would not result in effective or convenient local government.

Aldeburgh lies at the heart of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) that is under threat and any reduction in representation would be very detrimental to the town and surrounding communities which face important and controversial infrastructure projects such as Sizewell C and the East Anglia TWO and East Anglia ONE North windfarms. These projects bring associated development which would include large onshore electrical stations and the laying of large scale onshore cables likely to severely damage the AONB.

Aldeburgh and Snape are international destinations for the music industry and this itself creates challenges that warrant effective representation at local government level.

It is detrimental to suggest a reduction in representation when Aldeburgh, Leiston and surrounding communities are confronted by serious environmental and developmental challenges and makes no sense to ally Aldeburgh with communities the other side of the estuary such as Orford, Iken, Sudbourne and Gedgrave whose natural orientation is in the direction of Woodbridge in any event.

The Boundary Commission's recommendations explicitly aim to establish wards for East Suffolk District Council which would "improve electoral equality by equalising the number of electors each councillor represents, reflect community identity and provide for effective and convenient local government."

The view of the Aldeburgh Society is that the recommendations for Aldeburgh fail on all three counts.

Electoral equality:

The Sandlings ward is predicted to have a population of 3685 in 2023. This results in a variance of 2% based on the notional figure of 3471 per councillor. The population figure is taken from electoral roll figures which put Aldeburgh's own population at about 2600 today. The true population of Aldeburgh is of course much higher given the large number of second homes owned by Aldeburgh residents. Second home owners tend not to know they can register in two places and vote in two places. The result is that the proposal as it stands does not actually reflect the population of the area. Large numbers of visitors at weekends and in the summer holidays result as well in extra demands on district council services. The proposed number of Councillors also fails to reflect the council tax contribution of Aldeburgh and surrounds. This means taxpayers are to be denied fair representation. Aldeburgh's representation should reflect the boost to the local economy that its homes, businesses and tourism bring about. One Councillor who may not even be based in or near the town will not ensure equal representation.

Community Identity

As the recommendations point out at paras 73-76, the Sandlings ward as proposed fails "to demonstrate good internal connectivitythere is no direct access from the north to the south of the ward'. The report goes on to explain that travel is not straightforward in the proposed boundary.

Aldeburgh has on the other hand a great deal of community identity with Leiston. The two towns are connected by a direct road and travel is seamless. Aldeburgh residents use the leisure centre facilities in Leiston, the secondary school, the shops, the post office, the recycling centre and the cinema. Leiston residents use the beach, the pubs and the restaurants in Aldeburgh and many who work in Aldeburgh live in Leiston. Many Aldeburgh and Leiston residents work at, visit and support the international musical hub and major retail facility of Snape Maltings.

The Commission report in para 75 reveals that members considered combining Aldeburgh, Friston and Snape with Leiston in a three councillor ward and this is the solution that the Aldeburgh Society would support. The 12% population variance such a ward would create can be explained by reference to the second home numbers discussed above.

Effective and convenient local government:

The proposals as a whole tend to favour urban areas to the disadvantage of Aldeburgh and surrounding rural areas.

The present proposal to have only one councillor for the diverse and geographically spread ward of Sandlings represents a distinctly serious gap in representation and cannot lead to effective or convenient local government .

If Aldeburgh were part of a three member ward with Leiston the representation it would have at district level would be materially improved and the three councillors would represent communities with a great number of interests and problems in common.

Conclusion

The Aldeburgh Society rejects the proposal to create a single councillor ward to be known as Sandlings and calls for the creation of a three member ward including Leiston and surrounding communities.

Katherine Mackie

Chair

Aldeburgh Society