

## Guilden Sutton Parish Council

2013 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies.

Notes for submission to public hearing Thursday 13 October 2011.

### 1. Introduction.

The Council disagrees with the proposals for the Cheshire and Wirral sub region in that it believes Guilden Sutton, as part of Gowy ward, should remain in the proposed Chester constituency and should not be transferred to the proposed Winsford constituency on local ties grounds and inconvenience as cited in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, Schedule 2, rule 5 (a) and (b).

The Council believes the electoral requirement can largely be satisfied by including Gowy ward within the Chester constituency and by removing Groves and Whitby ward which logically should be within a constituency including Ellesmere Port Town.

### 2. Rationale

#### (a) Precedent.

Under the previous Review the Commission identified as a cause of controversy a counter proposal that the former Chester City Council Christleton ward, including Guilden Sutton, should be transferred to the Eddisbury parliamentary constituency. This corresponds with the present proposal that the parish should be within the proposed Winsford constituency.

The Assistant Commissioner commented: "To observe that the counter proposal provoked a massive response would be an understatement: save for one short letter dated the 19th October, 2003 written by Christopher Clayton, the dozens of responses spoke with one voice to the effect that Christleton was an integral part of the City of Chester C.C. and that a transfer would be at the expense of local ties in the pursuit of numerical parity."

The Assistant Commissioner added: "I had very detailed evidence about the ties of Christleton ward with Chester from local councillors, parish councils and many residents from Christleton. My visit to Christleton certainly confirmed the preliminary view that I had formed, namely that the case for transfer of Christleton ward had not begun to made out and that the counter proposal should be put to one side".

Guilden Sutton Parish Council argues there has been absolutely no change in the circumstances since the Commission's previous findings which confirmed Guilden Sutton as part of the City of Chester constituency and that it should remain there in order that the local ties referred to by the previous Assistant Commissioner should remain undisturbed.

#### (b) Local ties.

In reaching his decision, the Assistant Commissioner referred particularly to a letter dated 30th September 2003 from a Mr Roger Binks (No. 78) as summarising the opposition. p1

In part, this stated, according to the Assistant Commissioner's report:

Christleton ward forms part of the overall conurbation of the city.

The people of Christleton ward have strong links with Chester, from the perspective of history, location (2 miles from the centre), local authority services, doctors, hospitals, bus services, employment, shopping and entertainment.

Christleton does not have any of the above such links with any part of the Eddisbury constituency."

Mr Binks went on to say:"Even though Christleton ward comprises three small villages (Christleton, Littleton and Guilden Sutton) they are physically part of the urban conurbation of Chester and have no association with the vast and mostly rural constituency of Eddisbury."

So far as Guilden Sutton is concerned, that is entirely the view of Guilden Sutton Parish Council in 2011.

(iii) Evidence.

The two Chester City ward councillors for Christleton, who between them had been closely associated with Guilden Sutton for over 50 years, put forward a joint submission which in part dealt with the issue of local ties to the city.

The Council believes that evidence is entirely relevant to the present proposal. The key arguments presented on behalf of the former Christleton ward were and still are:

Christleton ward has strong ties to the city and to the rest of the Chester constituency. This was clearly shown by letters from over 60 individuals, each and every one of which, apart from one single letter, was in favour of maintaining the status quo which included Christleton ward within the City of Chester constituency.

The letters clearly set out the historical, church, business, community and cultural ties that the three villages which made up the ward had with the city.

A report commissioned by the Boundary Committee for England and dated October 2003 entitled "Community Research in Chester City Council area 2003" showed unequivocally as a result of both quantitative and qualitative research that residents in the former Chester City Council district area identified very strongly with their local neighbourhood or village and also specifically there was no sizeable proportion of residents who felt they belonged to any individual district or borough council area outside the Chester City Council area.

At that time, a significant proportion of the proposed Winsford constituency was within the former Vale Royal District Council area to which the report indicated Chester residents clearly did not feel they belonged. Guilden Sutton Parish Council contends this remains the case.

The report went on to show that the Chester City Council area was the main choice for an overwhelming proportion of residents for main food shopping, shopping for clothes, household goods, leisure and sporting activities and was the main place for work and children's schooling.

The ward members argued that amongst the settlements of the rural area, the villages of the Christleton ward were closest to the urban area of Chester.

There were "very, very strong local ties".

These included the following services and facilities provided within the urban area: local government services, central government services, Jobcentres, the Benefits Agency, motor taxation office, driving tests, all in Chester. The fire service was in Chester and remains there together with the police service. The health service with the excellent Countess of Chester Hospital and the ambulance service are in Chester.

As far as public transport was concerned, and again there has been no change, the main bus services and the railway station all emanate from Chester.

Secondary education was and is provided by high schools also in the ward or in the urban area including the independent King's School and Queen's School. Chester College, now the University of Chester, and West Cheshire College were and are in the urban area.

Shopping included and includes Sainsbury's supermarket in Great Boughton and Safeway in Upton. Chester City Centre is a major shopping area renowned throughout the country and clearly used by residents of the ward including Guilden Sutton.

So far as leisure facilities were concerned, all were and are in the Chester urban area, including the main swimming facilities, football club, rugby union club, cricket club, rowing and sports centres. A theatre\*, musical facilities, hotels and restaurants were all and are within the city. None are in Eddisbury constituency.

(\* now a studio theatre).

The ward councillors concluded there was no justification in terms of local ties to move the ward out of the City of Chester constituency and argued that would be in breach of rule 7 of the Rules for the Redistribution of Seats. Guilden Sutton Parish Council believes this remains the case today with very strong links between Guilden Sutton and the urban area including administrative, public services, education, shopping and leisure.

Councillor R M Armitage, then a senior Guilden Sutton parish councillor, told your predecessor: "All our community interests and ties lie with Chester for convenience and comparative shopping, for health care, for places of work and for all services and leisure facilities."

Cllr Armitage pointed out that all the village's public transport was to Chester and emphasised the parish had no links at all with the Eddisbury constituency "and indeed it is difficult get there."

He explained: "To get there we have to either cross or make use of the A51 through Littleton which is one of the busiest and most overloaded single carriageway roads in the country." That remains the case and the Parish Council believes any proposal to transfer the parish to the proposed Winsford constituency fails the convenience test on that basis.

Councillor Armitage argued that should a constituent wish to approach his or her MP about a matter which had arisen in the urban area of Chester, that would be dealt with by the Chester MP. If the parish were moved to a different constituency, residents would be in a disadvantaged position as the MP representing the village would not be representing the area where the problem had arisen. An MP for Eddisbury would not have the same detailed knowledge of Chester. The Parish Council remains in agreement with that view.

In response to a question he stated a visit to the Chester MP would involve a three mile journey by bus or any other means. Winsford was far more distant and difficult public transport would involve a journey first into Chester or a car journey on the A51. That remains the case,

He emphasised that "wherever possible social ties and natural boundaries should be the main thrust of the decision which you take" and that "the more important factor is to allow the local ties to dominate in this situation."

The Parish Council believes the arguments put forward by former Councillor Armitage and their strength apply undiminished in 2011.

(iv) Localism. The new factor which has risen is the priority being given by both Central Government and Cheshire West and Chester Council, the unitary authority, to Localism. The Westminster view of Localism, as the Parish Council understands, is that decisions will be made from the bottom up and that the views of local people and local communities will be extremely important and will carry significant weight. That is also the view of Cheshire West and Chester Council which has made it very clear that where there are Town and Parish Councils, as in Guilden Sutton, they will be at the heart of influencing the decision making process so far as the shaping of local services and facilities are concerned.

Given MPs are clearly important in this equation, Guilden Sutton Parish Council believes it is extremely important their local MP can identify very closely with the aims and aspirations of the community which are, of course, influenced by the local ties it has.

A key part of Localism will be the Neighbourhood Plan which will guide development in a defined neighbourhood. In order to take full advantage of this valuable new opportunity, Guilden Sutton Parish Council and Mickle Trafford and District Parish Council are co-operating in the development of a joint Neighbourhood Plan as the area covered by the two parishes has similar characteristics and suitable boundaries. However, if the Commission's proposals carry, Mickle Trafford and District would move from the Ellesmere Port constituency into the Chester constituency, which Guilden Sutton Parish Council believes is an extremely sensible and logical move, while Guilden Sutton would leave the Chester constituency and move into Winsford. One very sound move would be cancelled out by another for which there is absolutely no justification.

The result is the Neighbourhood Plan would find itself having to deal with not one but two MPs, neither of whom would have a firm grip on the overall picture which can hardly be said to be within the ethos and aspiration of Localism.

The fact that the local ties found in Mickle Trafford and District justify its inclusion within the Chester constituency apply equally strongly, if not more so, to Guilden Sutton parish which makes the proposal to transfer Guilden Sutton parish to Winsford all the more illogical.

Mr Stephen Mosley, the MP for Chester, has recognised "that people living so close to the city centre may find it unusual to be moved out of Chester to a predominately rural Winsford constituency." He is "supportive of areas like Mickle Trafford joining Chester" as "many people there couldn't understand why they weren't in the Chester constituency already". We would hope on the same grounds the Commission would support Guilden Sutton Parish Council's case to remain in the Chester constituency.

The MP also believes that a number of other areas, one of which is Dodleston, "should stay in the Chester constituency." I happen to know Dodleston well as I am a former clerk to Dodleston and District Parish Council. If you take one of the city's best known landmarks, Chester Railway Station, you will find that Guilden Sutton is significantly closer to Chester Station than is Dodleston. If the MP believes there is a strong case for Dodleston remaining in Chester constituency, on local ties there is an even stronger case for Guilden Sutton continuing in the Chester constituency.

Guilden Sutton Parish Council has quoted extensively from representations made to the previous Review as it believes those arguments for continuing to be part of the Chester constituency remain totally valid and unaltered. That was the firm conclusion of the previous Review and the Council believes the Commission reached the correct decision. There have been no changes to local ties and it remains the right decision today.

Proof that local ties remain unchanged comes from a Guilden Sutton resident who is unable to attend this hearing. Mr Mark Carrington has contacted the Council to say: "It would seem to me that areas such as Guilden Sutton, Littleton, Christleton, Vicars Cross and Boughton Heath are inextricably linked socially and economically with Chester. The vast majority of the proposed Winsford constituency is rural and would seem to have relatively few concerns in common with the suburban and commuter village areas immediately surrounding Chester". The Council strongly endorses his view.

(v) Reasons for the review.

The Parish Council recognises the decision to seek a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament, leading to this review, was a political decision and is aware of the basis on which the decision was taken. Being a non-political body, it believes it should not involve itself in commenting on that aspect.

The Parish Council does believe, however, the Commission should be aware that in order to ensure its democratic arrangements are suitable for the borough, Cheshire West and Chester Council has increased the number of borough councillors from 72 to 75, partly in order to ensure effective community engagement as mentioned in (iv) above. p5

The Parish Council argues any decision on new constituencies should equally take account of the ability of the Member of Parliament to effectively engage with the communities in his/her area and that proper recognition of local ties is essential in order to facilitate this. The Commission responsible for local authority boundaries is charged with ensuring the structure is in "good repair" and the Parish Council struggles to understand how a similar effect could be achieved by the damaging exclusion of Guilden Sutton from the Chester constituency.

(vi) Electorate.

The Commission encourages us to propose alternatives. The Parish Council recognises the Commission has to work within the electorate parameters which been set and believes, so far as the proposed Chester constituency is concerned, these can be met to include Guilden Sutton as indicated above, by replacing the Groves and Whitby ward with Goway ward. According to the calculations the Parish Council has been able to make, this would slightly exceed the upper guideline but we believe this could be rectified by discounting the farthest villages of Duddon, Clotton, Willington and Oscroft which by definition are closely related to the proposed Winsford constituency.

The Council recognises this has knock on effect for Groves and Whitby but would be confident that those making representations as to the loss of the Ellesmere Port constituency would place suitable proposals before you. It must surely have been recognised that a proposal to include within Chester a heavily built up ward which is an integral part of a free-standing town several miles distant with a strong sense of civic pride and a mayor in its own right could not begin to meet the test of local ties. The Parish Council therefore believes it is legitimate to envisage the likely removal of Groves and Whitby ward from the Chester constituency.

(vii) Constituency name.

In the event, despite the Parish Council's persuasive case, the Commission is minded to transfer the parish to the proposed Winsford constituency, the Commission is urged to consider an alternative name for the new constituency. It must be recognised that constituents in what is now the Chester Villages ward, a name carefully chosen by Cheshire West and Chester Council to reflect the characteristics of the area, which was supported by the Parish Council and approved by Parliament, do not feel in any way to be part of Winsford which is a town in its own right, 15 miles distant in what was a totally different local authority area.

Equally, the Council understands that constituents in Winsford Town would not be happy with perhaps a version of Chester East although that would have the merit of including the word "Chester" which is the borough's attack brand.

Setting that aside, the current constituency name of Eddisbury is historic, dating back to the late 12th century and already covers a significant part of the proposed constituency. The Council believes that Eddisbury would be preferable to Winsford. p6

Should the Commission seek a new alternative, the village of Beeston is geographically towards the centre of the proposed constituency and possesses a fine 13th century castle, built by an Earl of Chester, from which it is possible to see eight counties.

The Council suggests that Beeston Castle might be a splendid addition to the list of English constituencies.

(viii) Conclusion.

The Commission is invited to conclude, based on the evidence rehearsed above, that the counter proposal that Guilden Sutton within Gowy ward should continue to be part of the Chester constituency should be accepted.

The Commission is further asked to agree the proposal to include Guilden Sutton in the proposed Winsford ward is fatally flawed set against the Rule 5 test whilst the argument in favour of the parish remaining within Chester constituency is devastating.

To accommodate the counter proposal, the inclusion of Groves and Whitby ward within the Chester constituency should be replaced by the inclusion of the majority of Gowy ward as described above.

David Norbury  
Clerk  
Guilden Sutton Parish Council

13 October 2011

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