

DODFORD WITH GRAFTON PARISH COUNCIL
(BROMSGROVE DISTRICT)

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Review Officer (Bromsgrove)
Local Government Boundary Commission for England
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
LONDON
EC1M 5LG

Dear Sir

Electoral Review of Bromsgrove Consultation

I have been requested by Dodford with Grafton Parish Council who, after consultation with village residents, wish to object most strongly to the new proposal for the creation of a new ward of 'Perryfields' with the consequent abolition of the existing Woodvale ward.

The Boundary Commission, in framing proposed changes for the existing Woodvale Ward (and particularly the Parishes of Dodford with Grafton, Bournheath and the village of Fairfield) have patently failed to meet their statutory obligation (Schedule 2 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 ; Schedule 2-4, Parish Councils) that they must have regard to -

'a) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and, in particular,

- i) The desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and
- ii) The desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties.'

More particularly the Parish Council's objections to the revised proposals are set out below:

The three villages of Dodford, Bournheath and Fairfield largely constitute the present Woodvale ward and are almost entirely located to the west of the M5 which forms an identifiable and obvious boundary for the ward.

There are well-established connections between the three villages. Residents use the only shop and Post Office in the ward (located in Fairfield) and there are shared interests within the community, eg the 'Fairbourne Dodders Drama Group', table tennis teams, Bridge Club all drawing membership from across the villages.

Your Director of Reviews, Mr Gall, in submitting his new proposals refers to achieving 'stronger boundaries and providing for a better reflection of communities.' His proposals so far as Dodford, Bournheath and Fairfield are concerned patently fail to reflect this key consideration.

The proposed ward structure mixes parishes with non-parished areas eg Bournheath with Catshill, Dodford with Sidemoor. Existing parished areas and communities risk losing their identity as they are subsumed into non-parish wards.

The new proposals create artificial and inappropriate ward boundaries drawn, it appears, solely to meet a target figure of electors with no regard for community identities. Woodvale is a County as well as a District ward – a fact ignored in the review. It will remain as a county ward.

The initial Boundary Commission proposals provided for **‘an identical Woodvale Ward covering a rural area including the parishes of Dodford, Bournheath and parts of Belbroughton.’** The revised proposals give no reason for abandoning what was considered to be appropriate at that time.

The present number of electors in the Dodford with Grafton Parish is 649 with little change predicted by 2018. These would be absorbed into the figure of 2,544 predicted for the proposed new Perryfields ward at that date which would require some 1,895 from Sidemoor. Perryfields would therefore effectively become an urban ward in terms of elector numbers which would definitely be unacceptable to Dodford residents who have historically been part of a rural Woodvale with strong links to Bournheath and Fairfield.

There is no community link between Dodford and Sidemoor (separated physically for more than 50 years by the M5). The Perryfields proposal and those relating to Bournheath and Fairfield most certainly break ‘existing local ties’.

Neither would the Perryfields proposal **‘fix boundaries that are and would remain easily identifiable’** since it would incorporate only part of the built-up Sidemoor area.

The largely rural communities of Dodford with Grafton, Bournheath and Fairfield have long-established links properly reflected by the existing Woodvale Wards and well-served by a single Councillor at both District and County level. They should not be split up merely to meet the requirements of a ‘numbers game’ that would do nothing to improve community ties and elector representation – in fact quite the reverse.

Although not directly relevant to Dodford with Grafton, the current proposal to divide the village of Bournheath into two is perverse in the extreme and simply cannot be justified against the statutory criteria referred to at the top of this submission.

Finally, whilst acknowledging that the task of trying to meet the Bromsgrove District Council’s requests is not an easy one, we would stress the need to recognise the rural/urban distinctions and the traditional and well-established links between the three villages. Dodford with Grafton Parish Council therefore urge the Boundary Commission to rethink its new proposal and to retain the existing Woodvale Ward.

Yours sincerely

Kay Stone (Mrs)
Clerk to Dodford with Grafton Parish Council



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