

CHOLESBURY-CUM-ST LEONARDS PARISH COUNCIL

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To: Community Boards Consultation Team
Shadow Buckinghamshire Council

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Dear Colleagues,

Buckinghamshire Council Community Boards Consultation

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Shadow Buckinghamshire Authority's consultation on Community Boards.

This Council has played a leading role over the past eight years contributing to the development and success of the Chesham and Chiltern Villages Local Area Forum. Alongside the significant achievements of this Local Area Forum has been the successful achievement of cross-council collaborative working and development of a distinctive community spirit between the Councils involved.

For these reasons the Parish Council believes it is well-placed to comment on the proposals.

Overall Number of Community Boards

It is crucial to take the opportunity to build on the well-established and successful community working of the Chesham-focussed LAF and other successful examples of joint working in Buckinghamshire.

The Parish Council endorses the Shadow Authority's recommended proposal for **14 Community Boards** as this provides for the establishment of a Community Board dedicated to the Chesham and neighbouring parish areas. This will ensure the benefits gained from the parish councils working together to date can be built on by the members of the Community Board.

As a corollary, it would be of major concern to this Council should it be decided to not go forward with 14 Boards, but to reduce the number of Boards to 10 or 12. This would result in combining the Amersham and Chesham related parishes in a single Community Board which would

be a retrograde step. By creating a very large and potentially dysfunctional Community Board that would incorporate the third and fourth largest towns in Buckinghamshire, each with distinct community profiles and priorities. Rural parish councils will be at a distinct disadvantage having to compete with the priorities generated from two dominant town council areas.

Chesham Board Name

The proposed name for the Board centred on Chesham must reflect, aside from the town of Chesham, that it includes five rural-based parishes. The name of the LAF it will succeed was '**Chesham and Chiltern Villages**', this would also be an appropriate title for the Community Board, reflecting the urban and rural composition of the Board area.

Board Boundaries and Parish Council Composition

This Council supports the need for adopting a thorough and robust approach to determining Board boundary areas. It is hoped that such an analysis to identify Board boundaries is comparable to that normally applied to the determination of wards under the anticipated Buckinghamshire Council boundary review, so that there is minimal disruption to Board boundaries once the ward boundary review is implemented.

It is noted that, in contrast to the LAF composition, the proposed constituent parish councils of the Board omits The Lee Parish but includes Chenies Parish. There is a close affinity between The Lee Parish and the other parishes around Chesham. In contrast, at the time of the inception of the LAFs Chenies Parish Council successfully lobbied to be assigned to the Amersham LAF on the grounds that the Chenies community was more closely aligned with Little Chalfont/Amersham than it was aligned to Chesham.

Powers / Remit

This Council favours the **formal remit** which provides for the **maximum decision-making powers** permitted under the Authority's constitution.

Operating Model

This Council believes it is important that decisions taken by the Boards are made by the UA Members and Parish and Town Council representatives: i.e. the democratically elected representatives for the Community Board area.

One of the Boards' crucial roles is to provide a forum facilitating interaction with other partners - the police, voluntary organisations etc,

residents or businesses. However, though such organisations' and resident's input is vital to the successful performance of the Board, such contributions should be seen as enabling, influencing and informative, but not equal partners as far as the voting stage of the decision-taking process.

For the Chiltern District Council area, and presumably for at least some other areas in Buckinghamshire, Thames Valley Police have recently established a Community Forum which provides an opportunity for residents and community representatives to discuss and agree community-wide policing priorities to be executed by the local neighbourhood police teams, in conjunction with local authorities, other public Service organisations and community groups. It is crucial the activities of these Forums are allowed to continue alongside, but without overlap or conflict, with the work of the Boards.

It is essential to take account of the commitment required of parish and town councillors who in future will be required to not only attend 6 Board meetings per annum, but also, 'Sub-group' and 'Task and Finish' meetings. Bear in mind also, unlike the proposals for UA Members, parish and town councillors are not eligible to claim / do not routinely claim allowances. Scheduling a significant proportion of meetings during the daytime could also be problematic for parish and town councillors.

Decision-making

This Council recognises that Buckinghamshire Council Members have a primary role in decision-making for the Board and it recognising past experience of the Chesham and Chiltern Villages LAF that the vast majority of decision-making will be by consensus. **Accordingly, this Council endorses Operating Model b).**

Whilst it is anticipated most decisions will be arrived at by consensus. An issue that could arise, for which there needs to be a protocol in place, would be if the majority of parish and town council voting' representatives disagree with a decision taken by UA Members on the Board. Accordingly, there needs to be a means of review of Board decisions taken if against the wishes of a majority of town and parish council representatives.'

Related to the above concern, there is a particular concern where a number of UA Members on a particular Board are also parish / town councillors on a particular Council.

Referring specifically to the Chesham Board if, for example, the current

district and county councillors for the Chesham Board area were to become UA Members and retain their parish/ town councillor roles, of the 9 UA Members assigned to the Board at least 8 are also on Chesham Town Council. This would put the 5 rural Parish Councils at a significant disadvantage if a funding decision were to be taken by UA Members with a potential conflict of interest because of their association with Chesham Town Council.

Resourcing

a). Support staff - This Council welcomes the proposal for the Boards to have dedicated, and presumably appropriately skilled support staff.

NB. It should be noted though that in respect of the Local Area Forums the progressive eroding over the eight years of the numbers of trained staff dedicated to support all 19 LAFs has had a noticeable deleterious effect on the performance and effectiveness of the LAFs. Accordingly, the lessons need to be learnt to ensure the continued level of performance of Boards.

b). Funding The additional funding proposed to support the successful operation of the Boards is important, with additional funding, in future, alongside further devolution of decision making powers

Some flexibility is important by which the Board can decide to vire funds from one budget heading to another, subject to any ring-fencing is essential.

The funding model for each Board should not be based on equalising financial allocations between boards but should reflect the local needs of board areas, e.g. local strategic priorities, rural urban split, levels of deprivation, etc.

Highways funding – Whilst match-funding might form the default approach there should be scope for the Board where deemed appropriate to promote fully- or majority-Board funded highway schemes.

Should you require any further clarification please contact me. This Council looks forward to hearing the outcomes of this consultation.

Chris Brown

Chairman,

Cholesbury-cum-St Leonards Parish Council

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