

Consultation on Community Boards within the Unitary Authority for Buckinghamshire

The Hitcham and Taplow Society comments on these proposals.

The Society has been in existence for some sixty years. It has a main objective to ensure that all development within the district is of the highest standard and preserves the quality of the environment. It represents a significant proportion of the residents of Taplow.

14 or 19 Boards?

We are strongly in favour of 19 boards.

Although 14 may offer some modest economies in provision, the proposed areas do not correspond as well as the 19 to shared interests within board areas.

The 19 follow the existing boundaries of the LAFs, with which residents and councils are familiar and which much better match community interests.

In our own area of the county, the 19 option areas much better reflect our communities.

For example the proposed “Burnham and the Ivers” board of the 14 option brings together the predominantly rural western area with an eastern section that is much more focused on Heathrow and other more London centric matters. The 19 option of “Beeches” and “Wexham and Ivers” is a far better match to communities with common concerns.

We also point out the anomaly that in reducing from 19 to 14 boards, the Aylesbury board actually shrinks to be just the town. Given current concerns about remote management from Aylesbury this does not look ideal.

At a practical level, when so much is changing with the move to a new authority, keeping the familiar working patterns would be very sensible. As the new authority settles in revisions can be made if necessary.

Make up of boards

We consider that boards would be more respected and accepted if they carried decision making powers over the items within their remit. This remit should be more clearly defined than it is presently. **Option 3**

For decision making to be respected the composition of the board should be limited.

Operating model b) It may be tempting to have representatives of all interested parties but a better approach would be to limit to representatives of town and parish councils, although other parties can obviously represent at meetings. A standard agenda must include an initial mandatory session for the public to make statements, as is the practice for our Parish Council.

The missing consultation

Whilst this consultation is welcome, it highlights the complete absence of any discussion or statement on how planning decisions are to be managed. **The “19 boards” identified in the 2016 Executive Summary** are consulted on but the “5 local planning committees” have had no further mention.

Planning applications are by far the most locally significant of the tasks performed by the district councils. These decisions require a real understanding of local matters. The Shadow Authority may have plans for a distributed system but its silence on the matter in its public dialogue is of real concern and unwise. Good local access to planning application decision makers is essential if personal representation at planning committee and site visits for difficult cases are not to suffer.