

Bristol

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Comment text:

Please find attached initial comments from the Westbury on Trym Society regarding the review of electoral boundaries in Bristol.

Andrew Renshaw

Chair, WoTSoC

Attached Documents:

- wotsoc-initial-comments.doc



The Westbury-on-Trym Society

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shaping our future.

8 Southdown Road
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Bristol
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January 2025

Initial Response to the Boundary Commission for Bristol

Introduction to the Westbury on Trym Society

The Society is a voluntary organisation with a current membership of some 300 residents, which was established in 1972, initially to save the grade II listed Westbury on Trym village hall from the threat of demolition and re-development. Since then, it has helped to maintain and enhance the amenities, landscape and heritage of Westbury on Trym village and surrounding area, a large part of which is a designated conservation area. The Society is run by a small committee in accordance with its constitution.

Over the years the Society has been involved in many actions to prevent changes that it considered would have been detrimental to the area. At the time of the last ward boundary review the Society made strong representations to ensure the retention of a ward that properly reflected Westbury on Trym as an entity.

The Henleaze Society forms a similar function to the Westbury on Trym Society in the Henleaze part of the Westbury on Trym and Henleaze ward.

We are somewhat surprised that given our previous involvement in the last boundary review, that we found out about the new boundary review only by a chance meeting with a local councillor over a significant local issue. No formal communication has been received by e-mail or other means from any quarter.

The Society's Initial Comments

History and Context

Westbury on Trym, although now a suburb of Bristol, emanates from an ancient Christian settlement on the banks of the river Trym established as far back as the 8th century. Accordingly, it is older than Bristol, of which it only became a part in 1904.

It was at the end of the 8th century that King Offa of Mercia granted land at Westbury to his minister, Aethelmund, where a church was established. Early in the 9th century, land at Westbury passed to the Bishop of Worcester. Towards the end of the 10th century,



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Oswald, Bishop of Worcester sent a party of monks to found a Benedictine community here, which lasted for 350 years.

The monastery became a college at the end of the 12th century. It was rebuilt in the mid-15th century to resemble a miniature castle with turrets and a gatehouse. Westbury College was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1544 and became a private house. Prince Rupert used it as his quarters during the Civil War, when the Royalists attacked Bristol. Remnants of it remain in College Road close to the grade I listed parish church. The church has elements dating back to the 12th century and forms a key element of the Westbury on Trym conservation area.

Now a suburb of Bristol, Westbury on Trym once formed the centre of administration and worship for a much larger surrounding area. The ancient parish of Westbury-on-Trym extended over a huge area of what is now north Bristol and South Gloucestershire. It included Stoke Bishop, Henleaze, Redland, Avonmouth, Henbury and Shirehampton. On 1 October 1904, the civil parish was abolished and Westbury on Trym was absorbed into Bristol. The creation of a by-pass for the village, Falcondale Road, led to the growth of suburban housing in the area. Despite this, Westbury on Trym remains a distinctive part of Bristol with a unique rural villager character. The Henleaze part of the ward is almost entirely residential, with primarily Edwardian and interwar development.

Current Situation

Today there are close contacts between the two settlements, even though a connecting bus service no longer runs. In recent years the Henleaze 'town centre' shopping area has fared rather better than Westbury's town centre. Residents in the ward may use either centre for day to day needs.

It does not seem long ago that the boundary commission reviewed electoral wards in Bristol. The initial proposals in 2014 would have left most of the parish of Westbury on Trym in other wards and the rump of it being represented by only one councillor. You can imagine local feelings about this given the history of Westbury on Trym. Westbury had been a much larger ward with two councillors and prior to 1999 had three councillors. The solution which ultimately emerged was to enlarge the ward, so that it coincided with the parish boundary to the west and north and included neighbouring Henleaze.

Ward Statistics

The information on the council's website shows that in the Westbury on Trym & Henleaze ward there are 8% more voters per councillor than average and, if the ward boundary stays the same, in 2031 it is forecast to have 4% more voters than average.

Since the new ward was created after the 2014 review, we consider the arrangement has worked well. We have three councillors, and we consider that having three councillors is



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preferable to having two councillors. This number means that the councillors can spread their expertise and be members of a wider range of committees across the council. In our experience this is helpful in better representing the local community.

We note that neighbouring Stoke Bishop ward to the west has significantly fewer voters per councillor than average, and this is forecast to increase in 2031 to a 15% difference. Accordingly, the population of that ward would need to be expanded if it was to retain two councillors.

The boundary of the Westbury on Trym and Henleaze ward to Stoke Bishop, to the west and north corresponds to the parish boundary, along Parrys Lane/ Coombe Lane, reflecting the local community that considers itself to be part of Westbury. This is a sensible boundary. The only area where the ward boundary does not represent the community of Westbury is in that part of polling districts SMDD and SMDF, which are within the parish boundary of Westbury on Trym. SMDD includes an elderly persons complex known as Westbury Fields, together with Grasmere Close and the Elmfield Road area. Polling district SMDF includes Home Ground /Comb Paddock and Clover Ground, which we consider would also identify with Westbury on Trym and Henleaze rather than Southmead.

We would not support any attempt to recreate separate wards for Westbury on Trym and Henleaze, if this reduces the number of councillors that we have currently.