

Dorset

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Comment text:

Related subject: Ward member for Littlemoor and Preston

Please find attached submission.

Attached Documents:

- littlemoor-and-preston-boundary-submission-lol.docx

Cllr Louie O’Leary submission on Dorset Council warding review 2026

Declarations of interest:

Littlemoor resident, Chair of Littlemoor Community Action Group, Dorset councillor for Littlemoor and Preston, Weymouth Town councillor for Littlemoor.

I am writing to argue that the current Littlemoor and Preston ward be retained as a two-member ward, with a few amendments.

One is the inclusion of WIB15 – Bincombe Village Area (Plaisters) into the ward, as this fits nicely, as it is an anomaly and puts the whole of Plaisters Lane into the same ward.

The other is to include WIB2 in the ward. This is the Bincombe Park estate and the area of Nightingale Drive. While this area does not historically come into the Littlemoor area, and residents on both sides generally regard themselves as separate communities, with Littlemoor Road a clear dividing line and a different MP and town councillors, it makes electoral sense to add this in to make the two-member ward more electorally equitable.

Littlemoor is a diverse community. I have lived there my entire life, as has my family. While 30 years ago it was a council estate dominated by social housing, over the last several years it has changed massively. While there is the middle of Littlemoor, which still has a large proportion of social housing, there are now more affluent areas on the edges, such as to the west: The Finches, Kestrel View, The Woodpeckers, The Doves, etc., which some of their residents do not regard as Littlemoor.

Then there are the neighbourhoods of Buddleia Close, Honeysuckle Close, Gentian Way, etc., whose residents regard themselves as “Preston Downs” but are in Littlemoor historically and geographically. Littlemoor and Preston Downs have no public houses, two community buildings (one community centre and one family hub), one church (St Francis) linked to Preston and sharing the same minister, one school (Bincombe Valley School), and one library.

Preston is also diverse. Within it you have Overcombe, which is the area around Preston Beach Road; historic Preston is closer to Littlemoor geographically and north of Overcombe. Sutton Poyntz sits at the top of the area and is a small village that has a separate identity and community to both Littlemoor and Preston, but does share some things in common (schools, churches, community links).

Preston has two public houses, one church (St Andrew’s), one community centre, and two schools (St Andrew’s and Westfield Special Needs School). Sutton Poyntz has one pub and Mission Hall (linked to both Littlemoor and Preston church).

Why should they stay together?

Electoral equality

“One person, one vote” is key for me. If the ward is split, as proposed by some members of Dorset Council, then the numbers are as follows (2032):

Littlemoor (1 member): 3,993, or -2.6% over the average (this includes the addition of the area north of it).

Preston (1 member): 4,380, or +14.1% over the average (including the Plaisters Lane addition).

This is based on 84 Councillors and an average of 3827 councillors.

If you add the two, you get a fairer +8.3% to the average and create a solid ward based on uniform polling districts within the north-central eastern part of Weymouth: compact, fair, and already in existence and working well.

Precedent has been set and works

The Boundary Commission in 2018 was going to put Preston in with Radipole. However, following representations from local councillors and others, it was agreed to put it with Littlemoor instead due to geography and cohesion.

This has worked well, and no issues have been raised by residents or by the ward members at town or Dorset Council level. Changing this for reasons other than numerical would be confusing and unnecessary, and would also disrupt projects and plans at council and community level.

Community cohesion

Littlemoor residents use pubs in Preston and Sutton Poyntz, the doctor’s surgery (my surgery as a Littlemoor resident), and the church, of which we share the same minister. St Andrew’s School, which is just on the border, is seeing a growing number of its children coming from nearby new estates being built on the edges of Littlemoor and Preston Downs, despite being “in Preston.” Many of the school’s PTFA members also come from Littlemoor and its new outer estates.

Preston and Sutton Poyntz residents use the shopping centre at Littlemoor (and are pushing for a bus service that links the two areas, as opposed to going from Preston straight to town). Many of the Littlemoor church committee members come from Preston, as well as a large proportion of the foodbank volunteers. Preston residents also use the library on a regular basis, which is in Littlemoor and is the only one this side of

town, and where we hold a regular councillor surgery for Littlemoor and Preston residents.

Pubs are a key part of the community, and Littlemoor is without one. I use the Preston pubs on a regular basis and find them a valuable place to meet residents from both parts of the current ward. The Preston Scouts and Brownie troop (based in Sutton Poyntz) also have a decent proportion of their membership from Littlemoor and are in the same district.

Churches are another important aspect of community life, and both Littlemoor and Preston churches fall within the same parish and share roles (Littlemoor hosting Christingle, etc., and Preston midnight communion). This has developed over time and continues to do so. I am currently in talks with the Sutton Poyntz biodiversity group about taking a group of young people from Littlemoor Youth Club on a visit to see the work they do.

Bus services are a major issue in the ward, with the Number 2 Littlemoor bus running regularly and the Number 4 Preston bus running sporadically (Sutton Poyntz no longer has a service). We have now secured the running of the service to Preston in the evenings during the summer, especially. What is being requested is a new service running through Preston and Sutton Poyntz and coming through to Littlemoor into town via the new retail park, so residents can access services in Littlemoor (church, library, shops, dentist, etc.).

In terms of community neighbourhood policing, Littlemoor, Preston, and Sutton Poyntz are in the same beat area, sharing the same officer. This has been particularly helpful recently during a spate of ASB that has affected the area.

Future development

In both the Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan (which is in force) and the emerging Dorset Local Plan (which, in terms of land allocation, will take precedence over the neighbourhood plan), development will bring Preston and Littlemoor closer together, closing the green gaps.

On the northern side of Littlemoor Road by the garden centre, this will also be connected to the area north via agreed development of industrial units alongside housing. A new Tesco is currently going through planning on the edge of the area north of Littlemoor Road, which will likely cater to a large degree to residents from Preston and Sutton Poyntz.

In the future, the area north of Littlemoor will be joined to Preston. Keeping the ward united would also bring the key green spaces shared by both sides of the ward together and make their management more coherent.

Two-member wards

While, for geographic reasons, I see the advantage of having single-member wards in rural areas, and why areas such as Portland and Verwood are three-member wards, I think two-member wards have advantages in areas like Weymouth.

Having two-member wards allows for the sharing of work if one member is a cabinet member, meaning residents still receive good, consistent services. This was the case for me with my first ward partner, Cllr Tony Ferrari, when he served on the cabinet. It also allows coverage of ward work during illness, death, or absence. I experienced this when Cllr Ferrari passed away and I was able to cover for over two and a half months.

If this were a single-member ward, this would be more difficult, and there would be no one else from a similar party or a clearly aligned neighbouring ward to cover the work. Having fewer, larger wards also makes administration easier at council level in terms of officer time and planning processes, as dozens of small wards can create confusion.

We hold a regular surgery in the Littlemoor library and share this between us. We do the same with casework, dividing it as equally as possible. From my experience as a young councillor who works full-time, having a shared ward allows the workload to be managed more effectively, especially as one councillor can attend events when another may be at work.

Division based on outdated views

The only arguments I have seen in favour of splitting the ward have come from councillors outside the area and appear to be based on perceptions that are long out of date. To the casual observer moving to single member wards would be seen as change for change sake, offer no benefit to the electorate and impacting community identity and connectivity. The wisdom used in preparing the 2018 warding was sound.

Yes, there is deprivation in Littlemoor, but there is also deprivation in Sutton Poyntz and Preston, including elderly poverty (particularly fuel poverty), and Sutton Poyntz also has some social housing. Littlemoor had a poor reputation in the past, but this has decreased significantly over recent decades due to new housing, increased home ownership through Right to Buy, and other factors.

As far as I am aware, we do not divide wards based on deprivation or outdated class notions. If we did, we would create a ward of the old Littlemoor estate and the Bridlebank estate in Upwey and Broadway, and then place the Preston Downs estate with Preston and Sutton Poyntz.

I believe such a move would send a negative message about Littlemoor and could be seen as a form of social segregation. Being in a ward with Preston at Dorset Council

level has not prevented Littlemoor from receiving funding to address its issues—for example, it was recently awarded part of the Government's Pride in Place funding, in which both Dorset councillors are actively involved.

In planning, we aim to encourage a mix of housing, rather than fully segregated affordable developments. Separating the wards along the lines suggested would go against this principle.

This principle of keeping this as one two member ward was agreed by the Councils cross party working group by a vote of 9-1. It was also re-affirmed at full council 47-12 with 10 abstentions after lengthy debate. All the current elected ward members at both town and Dorset council level support keeping it as a joint two member ward and there has been no appetite expressed by residents or any organisation to my knowledge requesting the ward be split up.