Meriden Parish Council

The Pavilion
Meriden Sports Park
10 Main Road
Meriden
CV7 7SP

Local Government Boundary Commission
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Response from Meriden Parish Council to the draft recommendation of new wards within Solihull.

Meriden Parish Council would like to respond to the recommendation of the removal of the Meriden ward name and Meriden being placed in the Arden ward with the separation from the proposed Balsall and Berkswell ward.

The Parish Council would strongly disagree with moving the village into a new Arden ward, formerly Bickenhill, on the grounds that there already exists a close working relationship between the villages that form the current Meriden ward. Meriden Parish Council has a history of working closely with Balsall Parish Council and Berkswell Parish Council on a variety of issues such as neighbourhood plan development and support, planning in relation to the large number of quarry sites that span the borders, High Speed Rail Two issues, education offer issues, and more recently speeding through the joint scheme put forward by the Local Authority for Average Speed Check Cameras after much lobbying by all three Councils and the Ward Councillors. Such a strong level of joint working exists not only because of the geographical proximity to these other Parishes, but because the make-up of the population is also very closely aligned.

History of Meriden

Meriden Parish Council is opposed to the proposed name of "Arden" as a ward. Meriden has a long and rich history, historically believed to be the centre of England for hundreds of years. While modern geographers have concluded otherwise, the legend endures as the five hundred year old cross still stands on the Village Green to this day, attracting interest nationwide.

The name "Meriden" itself is also of great importance - originating from the Old English word "Myrge" (meaning "pleasant", "attractive" and "enjoyable"). The name has long been associated with the area since the 15th century due to its geographical location, being surrounded by rich countryside.

In the present, Meriden has evolved into a thriving and close knit village community - the local identity and strong sense of togetherness, united under the name "Meriden" can be seen from events uniting the community such as Picnic in the Park to the bustling Meriden News and Views Facebook group with over 4,600 members.

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The Parish Council believes that the name "Meriden" holds far greater historical significance not just for the West Midlands, but for England as a whole. The name "Meriden" is significantly more representative of the area, community and standout local identity, hence our strong opposition to the proposed ward name change.

Geography of Meriden

The population (according to the 2021 census) of the Bickenhill and Marston Green parish is 7,432, compared with Meriden parish's 3,200. The proposed Arden ward will also take in Hampton-in-Arden parish (population 2,908), which includes Catherine-de-Barnes.

Geographically, Meriden is situated on the Coventry side of the M42, and east of the A452, with our local post town being Coventry, while Bickenhill, Marston Green and Catherine-de-Barnes are on the Birmingham side, and Hampton-in-Arden west of the A452, all with Birmingham postcodes. The Bickenhill and Marston Green parish contains Birmingham International Railway station and Birmingham Airport.

Culturally, Meriden also favours Coventry over Birmingham – note for instance that locals refer to a soft bread roll as a "batch", a distinctly Coventry term. This is further reinforced by how locals refer to the A45 colloquially: in Meriden, we refer to it as the Birmingham Road (i.e. we are nearer the Coventry end, so it is the road that leads to Birmingham); however, in Bickenhill and Marston Green, the A45 is commonly referred to as the Coventry road (for the opposite reason).

Balsall and Berkswell share our Coventry leaning, and are a more logical geographical and cultural grouping with Meriden than Bickenhill is. The recommendations of the boundary review give Meriden's strong East-West links with Hampton-in-Arden as justification for inclusion of Meriden in the Arden ward. However, this ignores the equally strong, if not stronger, road linkages with Berkswell and Balsall.

The shape of the proposed Arden ward has Meriden out on a narrow, eastern dog leg. It would surely make more sense for the eastern protrusion of the proposed Arden ward (i.e. east of the A452, which bisects the ward at its narrowest point) to continue to be grouped with the Balsall and Berkswell ward, with the proposed Arden ward instead incorporating some of the western protrusion of the Balsall and Berkswell ward.

Health

The issues Meriden residents face are often similar to Balsall and Berkswell's residents and require similar solutions, for example more recently there has been the creation of a joint parish Health and Wellbeing Group that has led to the inception of a community volunteer driving scheme to aid elderly residents, or those with limited mobility, to get to and from hospital appointments as this was a common issue residents contacted us about, with all three parishes (Meriden, Berkswell and Balsall) suffering from poor public connectivity. All of these commonalities across the Parishes allow for a stronger voice to

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be passed through a shared ward Councillors, it allows for our ward Councillors to better understand and get to grips with the problems we have and by splitting us weakens this.

There are also existing boundaries that span the villages that would bolster the case for keeping Meriden within the existing ward. The main one is the Balsall and Meriden GP Practice. The health boundary has been long lasting with a small village surgery located in Meriden, but with a large number of services now being moved to the newer larger surgery in Balsall Common. Meriden residents also travel to Balsall Common to use the local dentist and opticians.

Education

The secondary school catchment area is also an existing geographical link that more closely aligns to the existing arrangement over that of the proposed one moving forward. The Majority of secondary age school children in Meriden attend the Heart of England school located in nearby Balsall Common. The local Primary school in the village has often acted as a feeder school to Heart of England, and the catchment area, which is accessible on the internet, clearly highlights a geographically boundary more closely aligned to the current ward geography over that of the proposed changes.

Transport and Infrastructure

There are close similarities to the villages by way of transport and infrastructure. Meriden is served with some limited shopping through two small village shops, with Balsall Common being the next nearest village with larger shops and the closest petrol station which is accessed by most on the A452. Balsall Common is also used by a large number of Meriden residents to access a more vibrant nighttime economy, offering a wider variety and larger number of restaurants. Most Meriden residents also use the Berkswell train station, and its free parking, to access the wider rail network which only more closely links the two villages by way of infrastructural assets.

To conclude, whilst all of the above is more tangible evidence of a shared identity, there is a less tangible feeling amongst residents that we identify more strongly with the villages of Balsall Common and Berkswell over that of for example Marston Green. There are long lasting, multi-generational ties amongst families across the three villages (Meriden, Balsall and Berkswell) and little links to the new proposed ward conurbations. This can mostly be linked back to two factors, the primary school within Meriden feeding into the local Secondary School in Balsall Common, like Berkswell, meaning that families often have friends across the three areas. The second is the long-lasting farming families that cross the borders and the history associated with this. Residents have shared with us their concerns about losing this longstanding link through the moving of the village into a new ward that is not associated with Balsall Common and Meriden.