

Dear Chairman,

I write to support the proposal submitted to the Boundaries Commission by Central Bedfordshire Authority. This proposal has cross party political support within the council, is expected to be approved by a vote of the full council, has been discussed with and supported by local parish councils, local residents, community action and amenities groups and many residents who I am sure will all contact you individually.

I am supportive of the objective to equalise constituencies and recognise the need to reduce the number of MPs.

However, what I am not supportive of is the voices of local people being ignored, as has recently happened during a planning decision taken by the IPC and has caused much disenchantment amongst the residents of Mid Bedfordshire and a feeling that they are powerless to influence decisions regarding their own environment or community.

When I proudly made my maiden speech, I spoke about the historic rural roots of Bedfordshire and its market garden traditions.

I spoke about the small local farmers and how at five am in the mornings the lanes come alive with small trucks taking their wares to Covent Garden.

Chairman, you may be unaware that during the war, Mid Bedfordshire played a crucial role in helping to feed Britain and whereas now, the economic focus has moved towards tourism, our farmers and market gardeners still prosper. They contribute to the local economy and provide the rural back cloth which has helped to attract additional diverse economic drivers and contributors to Mid Bedfordshire such as Woburn Safari Park and Centre Parks.

In very recent history, at a cost of £25million, Bedfordshire became a unitary authority. The decision was implemented following much discussion and debate both internally within Bedfordshire and with previous government ministers. A very serious amount of thought and discussion was given over to the type of arrangement which would best

serve the residents of Bedfordshire and as a result, a three tier authority was created. This decision was taken on the basis that Bedfordshire is a county with some of the most complex, demanding issues which face both society and politicians of the day. Luton, Bedford, and the rural centre could not be more culturally diverse or demographically divergent.

The newly formed unitary council recognised this and have recently settled into a pattern of service delivery which has taken huge effort and commitment on behalf of authority staff, I think everyone can now say that we can be very proud of our unitary authority and the way it has handled one of the toughest problems imaginable, how to serve three demographic groupings within a county as diverse as Bedfordshire.

In a good way, Bedfordshire people are tribal in as much as it is a county with a very strong local population. One which welcomes in strangers and is tolerant, I can vouch for that as an outsider, however, this tolerance and welcome demeanour I believe is rooted in a sense of people knowing who they are and where they belong.

These new proposals rip Mid Bedfordshire asunder and cast its residents to group with urban hubs and even an entirely different county in a way which has taken no account whatsoever of the needs or wishes of local people.

Bedfordshire people are proud of their historic connection to John Bunyan; they celebrate the Bedfordshire Clanger, river festivals, and Bedfordshire May dances along with many other local traditions which exist in each and every village across a county dotted with Norman Churches. Bedfordshire, people in no way whatsoever feel any connection with Hertfordshire. They are happy to look towards Bedford and Luton as their urban centres, but value and cherish their rural identity. To place part of Bedfordshire with Hertfordshire is frankly as big an anathema to the local population as though they had been grouped with Mars.

Transport links between Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, are extremely difficult and poor either by road or rail and as a result there is no synergy whatsoever between the two counties.

This is because historic road planning focused on enabling the rural counties to get their farming produce out towards the motorway and to London and the wider country, not to each other.

People in Bedfordshire fight for their county, they take on huge American Corporations and Prime Ministers who want to inappropriately dump 25,000 poor standard eco homes, in the midst of their green belt in order to maintain the environment they want to live in. They mount demonstrations even closing down the main trunk road from junction 13 on the M1 to Bedford on a busy Saturday afternoon to make sure the powers that be know how hard Bedfordshire residents will fight for their community and Chairman, I have to say, it may happen again sooner than you may think!

When Luton Town Football Club were approached by private business to move the club into Mid Bedfordshire in order to Trojan horse in huge warehouse developments, the whole of Toddington, Harlington and the villages came together and fought off the plan, which was ultimately rejected.

Mr Chairman, people in Bedfordshire are used to fighting to maintain their identity and at a time when the Government is both encouraging communities to become more cohesive and responsible for its own environment I sincerely hope that the wishes of the people of Mid Bedfordshire will be taken account of.

Bedfordshire residents are attached to Bedfordshire with an invisible umbilical cord and passionate about its past present and future and they are now concerned that this break up of their parliamentary constituency will create a template for further disruption and disregard for its rural centre.

I can vouch as an MP that if I had a constituency with a demanding urban hub and a rural periphery, by a process of sheer demand, the hub would take precedent. It is a fact of life and always the case.

Rural communities suffer from large areas of deprivation and unique problems based on transport, logistics, education and policing. Areas which cannot afford to become submerged beneath the more expensive, louder demands of larger towns.

Mr Chairman, I have also requested a parliamentary debate in order that I can represent the views of my constituents in an additional forum. One which highlights the special diverse considerations of Bedfordshire.

The thrust of my argument during this debate will be that we live in a democracy and that in accordance with the wished of the elected government of the day; local people should have more power over their communities and must be heard.

With this in mind, I hope the boundary commission will accept the proposal put forward by the local authority and will listen to the voices of the individual families of Bedfordshire and pay close regard to the many emails and letters you will receive from local people. Just because they live in villages or market towns doesn't mean their voices are any less worthy than those in urban centres.