

## **STEEPLE ASTON PARISH COUNCIL**

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23rd March 2017

Cllr Barry Wood  
Leader of the Council

Cc Victoria Prentis MP  
Cc Cllr Kerford-Byrnes  
Cc Cllr Macnamara

### **Proposed Unitary Council for Oxfordshire**

Steeple Aston Parish Council have discussed the various proposals for a new Unitary body and do not agree with the current plans put forward by what is now Oxfordshire County Council. We favour a much more local set of arrangements.

We note that the Single Unitary Proposals have changed several times and those which went out for public consultation are not those which have gone forward to the OCC Executive. That means the proposals voted upon will not have been subject to a proper consultation, and the consultation undertaken and responses to it are thus inherently flawed from the outset.

The original proposals were for a single strategic body with 5 local administrations tasked with implementing those strategies as they considered appropriate to their own electorate. The latest proposals are for between 15 and 20 “Local Areas”. Whilst this may have the appearance of giving a more input in rural areas to balance the influence of the larger towns, it is something which we in rural environments have experienced from CDC in any case.

I now doubt whether the alleged “savings”, which were always theoretical in origin, will meet the targets set for the 5-Area proposals as more areas must mean more administration and running costs. There will also be a greater fragmentation of the overall budget. I have been given to understand by OCC that each local budget will include a discretionary element for local areas to undertake specific projects outside the overarching central strategies.

Whilst this might have had a chance of working when applied to 5 sub-units, when sums are divided into fifteenths or twentieths not only is there a strong possibility of non-joined up thinking at area boundaries, the overall discretionary small sums will mitigate against any realistic possibilities of proper local projects of substance being taken up. It will also place even more control at the centre, away from local electors. For example, would the “new” councillors in the south of Oxfordshire be as passionate about keeping the Horton hospital open as CDC have been. It is also quite likely that the central Oxford hospitals will suck even more resources away from other parts of the county.

Although “savings” are projected, there is very little about the supposed savings achieving better outcomes or better quality of services, other than a rearrangement of financial constraints, at quite possibly, a higher cost to electors.

The main issue besides finance in a 15/20 scenario is that through dividing accountability into small chunks, the Centre will retain more power and have more control than if it had to co-operate with a much smaller number of larger areas. This may also be the reason why OCC are pressing for Oxford City to become entirely “parished”, which could offset the city’s influence on the new unitary council.

One of our major concerns is about the Mid-Cherwell neighbourhood Plan, now well into refining and honing our policies prior to beginning the submission processes. If the proposals receive the assent of the Secretary of State, then there would only be a couple of years more of CDC’s Local Plan (as CDC would cease to be the Planning Authority) to which all our neighbourhood plans relate. After that it would be redundant, and replaced by a completely new set of policies that would render our neighbourhood plans void. All the work thus far would be negated. This is a devastating implication of the OCC proposal, and will affect all Neighbourhood Plan groups in Oxfordshire.

Yours faithfully

John Coley  
Chairman  
Steeple Aston Parish Council