

## Bruisyard Parish Council

**This paper is the response by Bruisyard Parish Council to the draft proposal for unitary local government in Suffolk prepared by The Boundary Committee for England.**

1. The draft proposal has been evaluated against the five criteria set out by the Secretary of State in October 2006, namely;

- attract a broad cross-section of support
- provide for strong, effective and accountable strategic leadership
- deliver the empowerment of citizens and communities, so that all communities have power and resources to influence the decisions that affect them in their localities
- provide value for money services – services should be provided effectively, efficiently and in an integrated and coherent way, ultimately driving customer satisfaction; and
- be affordable – the change to a unitary structure should deliver value for money and be self-financing, with transitional costs being capable of being paid back within a 5 year period

2. Bruisyard Parish Council do not consider the proposal of two unitary authorities of 'Ipswich & Felixstowe' and 'Suffolk' meet the above criteria for the following reasons;

- the proposal is largely based on the 'Option B' suggested by Suffolk County Council Liberal Democrats. This group consists of only 8 county councillors out of a total of 75. No group which will be directly affected by this proposal has provided strong support for the formation of a 'Rural Suffolk' unitary council which would cover ~65% of the total population of Suffolk.
- Strategic leadership will be diluted by the formation of two unitary councils for a total population of 700,000 resulting in a weaker voice at both regional, national and EU levels. For example, the successful development of the Ipswich/Felixstowe area which is of national importance will depend on the infrastructure (transport, housing, policing etc) of the surrounding 'Rural Suffolk' unitary council and a holistic approach will be needed.
- There would be no improvement in the empowerment of citizens or communities. The proposal to introduce Community Boards/Area Committees will introduce a new management and decision-making tier, lengthen communication channels and reduce clear lines of accountability.
- Economies of scale for those services currently provided by the County Council will be reduced with a potential doubling of the administration costs. These additional costs are unlikely to be offset by the amalgamation of the current District Council services into the two unitary bodies. In addition the ability to deliver integrated and coherent services across the county will be reduced. Some examples of this are: (i) a coordinated bus transport infrastructure, in particular to and from the major retail and employment areas (ii) reduced parental choice for schooling particularly for those living close to the new proposed boundaries (iii) planning and implementation of highway improvements across the county (iv) reduced flexibility in the provision of social services, particularly for those with special needs.

- The costs associated with duplicating the facilities and services currently provided by the County Council will be significant and it is very unlikely that these will be offset by cost savings realised by amalgamating the District Council functions. For this proposal to be self-financing would imply a reduction in services and customer satisfaction.

3. After consideration and evaluation of the various proposals that have been submitted, Bruisyard Parish Council recommends;

- the formation of a new unitary council for the whole of Suffolk
- the amalgamation of Lowestoft including North East Waveney into the Norfolk unitary council has merits in addressing the specific development and social issues in coordination with the Great Yarmouth area. This should however be dependent on consultation and agreement of the representative bodies directly affected.
- the town and parish councils are existing democratically elected bodies which are currently under utilised and have the potential to deliver greater local accountability, understanding of local needs and deliver far greater empowerment to citizens and communities. The town and parish councils should mirror the decision making structure adopted at the unitary council level at which responsibilities are delegated to specific members. This would then give clear lines of communication between individuals at town/parish and the new unitary county levels (eg. education, economic and cultural development, roads and transport, planning etc etc) and clear accountability and responsibility at both the local and county levels. It is envisaged that the larger towns, such as Ipswich and Felixstowe, can take on greater levels of delegated responsibility for services based on their ability to deliver. Over time delegation of specific services could extend to other towns and large parishes (or groups of parishes). Delegation should be supported by a business case agreed by the unitary council – continuance of delegated powers will be dependent on delivery performance against the agreed business case.

4. This proposal is largely in line with the 'One Suffolk' proposal jointly submitted by Suffolk County Council and Mid Suffolk District Council and we believe will come closest to meeting the five criteria set out by the Secretary of State. We do however feel that considerable work needs to be done to clarify the executive structure and reporting/consultation processes with town and parish councils. Bruisyard Parish Council would welcome the opportunity to work with Suffolk County Council and other bodies on this proposal.

Agreed by Bruisyard Parish Council on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

Peter Robinson - Chairman