

The Review Manager,  
Norfolk and Suffolk Reviews,  
The Boundary Committee for England,  
Trevelyan House,  
Great Peter Street,  
London SW1P 2HW.

16 Garland Street  
Bury St Edmunds  
Suffolk IP33 1EZ

11<sup>th</sup> September 2008

Dear Sir,

### **Boundary Committee Recommendations for Suffolk**

The Bury St. Edmunds Society was established in 1971. It is the only amenity society in the town and takes a particular interest in heritage and planning matters. You will be aware that the town has a long and distinguished history. The Society is also very concerned with matters of local administration, and welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Boundary Committee's Draft Proposal for the future of local government in Suffolk.

The Society asks that further consideration be given to preserving the existing borough councils that have evolved over time to serve the diverse communities in Suffolk, but only based on the strengthening of local democracy through effective and meaningful delegated powers being given to the town council who should be in control of the town's buildings and assets, Heritage, parks and facilities. This would put "Local" in the correct context and is the paramount concern of the Society's view to seeking to obtain improved and effective real democratic local government properly representing the townspeople of Bury St Edmunds. However, if we are strictly limited to a choice of the two options referred to in your draft proposals, we would support the committee's initial conclusion that **two unitary authorities** (excluding the Lowestoft area) would be more able to achieve the Secretary of States five criteria for the reasons stated in this letter.

We believe there is considerable merit in separating the port and industrial areas from the mainly rural area, because the interests of these do not coincide. One unitary containing the principal dock-industrial-commercial concerns and another based on market towns and the hinterland they serve is clearly logical. Each would then be able to respond to government initiatives in a way which would be directly related to its own circumstances. The Society can understand your reasons for putting Lowestoft outside Suffolk.

On the assumption that ward boundaries would remain virtually unchanged from those existing, we consider that a single unitary with a population now in excess of the 2001 census figure of 596,853 would be unwieldy. By contrast, the smaller population of 391,850 (2001) in the proposed Suffolk Unitary would be small enough to be effective, yet large enough to be viable.

The Suffolk Unitary could be accommodated in the PSV being developed at Bury St. Edmunds, and construction will be completed well before the unitaries are set up. Adjacent to this is a large and unoccupied building also in the ownership of the Borough Council, which could provide for a second phase of such development if this were required. However, we are led to believe that other PSVs are in existence or are being considered within the county. Until the present situation has been resolved, we consider that a moratorium should urgently be placed on disposal of Borough or County owned premises within the town centre. These buildings would have become surplus to requirements on the move to the PSV, but this was prior to the government's instruction to your Committee to review re-organisation. Despite this change preparation for disposal is well advanced and if allowed to continue could be prejudicial to the requirements of a future administration as well as being an inexcusable waste of Council Tax money, especially in the current precarious property market.

This Society also prefers the two unitary proposals because 34.35% of the county population (excluding Lowestoft) would be located in the Ipswich-Felixstowe unitary. If ward boundaries remain unaltered, approximately the same proportion of councillors would be in the new authority, and these would be expected to make planning and other judgements on matters within the market towns/rural areas. In the Borough of St. Edmundsbury, we have unfortunate experience of councillors being involved in decision-making on subjects which are beyond their purview or interest, and we think it important to avoid this situation in the future. This would better be achieved with the two unitaries you suggest.

The Borough of St. Edmundsbury is a centre of heritage and one of the richest in England. It holds a wealth of artefacts, including the John Gershom-Parkington Memorial Collection of timepieces bequeathed to the town of Bury St. Edmunds by Frederic Gershom-Parkington. In any unitary, these (including the money) would become the property of the new authority. The internationally famed timepiece collection is now in store, because the Borough decided to close the Manor House museum. A new authority with a more enlightened attitude towards artefacts could resolve to put these on exhibition in another town, but this would be contrary to the intention of the bequest, and again supports a new authority which would exclude Ipswich and Lowestoft. This Society regards it as important that each new parish board should keep control of its heritage items to retain its historic identity, and we would like the Boundary Committee to formulate obligatory rules for this, please.

This Society regards it crucial that any new unitary should be directed to the extent it delegates functions. Within the Borough of St. Edmundsbury, a Bury St. Edmunds town council was set up by majority voting well after the Borough had been established. But the Borough refused to delegate to it any but the most insignificant functions, such as Christmas lights and litter bins. This resulted in humiliation for the town councillors, failure of the original intention to have a council dedicated to the welfare of the town, and the reluctance of potential councillors to stand for election there. We believe that smaller unitaries would be more able to deal with this. Delegation is another matter which we would like the Committee to regulate, or to refer for legislation, please.

Essentially we are seeking a system of local government where community empowerment is important, and I should be grateful if your Committee would kindly take all these matters into consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Sarah Green,  
Chairman.