

CENTRAL NORWICH CITIZENS' FORUM

Response to Boundary Committee Proposals

Introduction

The Central Norwich Citizens' Forum was originally formed in 1998 as a residents' association within Norwich City Council's *Community Power* initiative but reconstituted itself to become a company, a registered charity and a Development Trust when later the City Council withdrew its financial and administrative support. It works to improve the quality of life of those, now about 9,000, residents who live in Central Norwich (as defined by the Local Plan) bounded by the old city walls and the River Wensum but including the development at Riverside.

Membership, as defined in its Memorandum and Articles of Association, is open to residents included on the Electoral Register and therefore over the age of 18. By recent decision of the Forum that membership is to be expanded to include children and young people attending the two secondary schools within its purview who will be encouraged to participate under the *HEAR BY RIGHT* initiative.

The objects of the Forum are *"for the benefit of the residents of Norwich City without distinction of sex, sexual orientation, disability, age race, political or religious beliefs or other opinions, by associating together the said inhabitants and local authorities, voluntary and other organisations in a common effort to encourage and enable said residents to take an active part in civil life and to promote good citizenship, with the object of improving the quality of life and well-being of the community"*.

To achieve these objectives the Forum actively works through various partnerships – the City Centre Management Partnership (on which its Chairman is a member of the Board and the Executive), the Norwich City Licensing Forum (on which the Chairman is a founder member), the City Centre Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel (SNAP) on which the Chairman is chairman, the Greater Norwich Development Partnership, the Social Issues Round Table and various others.

The Forum is routinely consulted by the City Council on all Planning applications, Premises Licence applications, Tables and Chairs Licence applications, traffic and transport proposals, housing, waste management and community safety.

From our point of view, therefore, it is vital that whatever the outcome of the various options being considered by the Boundary Committee has regard for the vital role that we play in the affairs of Norwich however that comes to be governed.

The Draft Proposals

With this in mind, we find the draft proposal made by the Boundary Committee for England for a unitary council for the whole of Norfolk, including Lowestoft (in Suffolk) and the consequent

abolition of the City Council to be completely incomprehensible and incapable of delivering the improvements in governance needed.

Finding the right form of governance for a greater Norwich should, we believe, provide a potential for economic and developmental dynamism. We believe that the best solution for both Norwich and Norfolk would be for Norwich to become a unitary council and, if it is thereby necessary to expand the City's boundaries to achieve that as suggested by the Committee in Pattern B, the so-called *doughnut solution*, then so be it. This would provide such a greater Norwich with the basis on which to thrive as a proper focus for Norfolk and beyond. The recent growth of settlements adjoining the city as it has expanded, though not for now part of it, should be corrected and they be allowed to be absorbed into the greater whole.

Representing, as we do, the population resident only in the city centre we well understand and appreciate the differences between our problems and aspirations and those of the residents who live in the outer suburbs but they are at least a whole community in the sense that so many suburban residents work and play in the city centre, 50,000 travelling in daily and 29,000 seeking entertainment in the evenings and at weekends. It is right, therefore, that they should be governed as one whole. However, compared with the problems and aspirations of those residents living in the more rural hinterland of the county there are relatively few commonalities or similarities and little sense of being one community though such exists for most of the rest of the county. Even the Parliamentary constituencies as presently drawn illustrate and recognise that fact.

Under the present arrangement there is no coherent traffic and transport policy that makes any kind of sense since the sharing of these functions between City and County always results in the City's wishes being subsumed by those of the County that can always outvote its representatives. The same applies to the lighting strategy that, because of similar sharing arrangements, precludes the City from achieving what it desperately needs. Refuse collection and waste disposal present similar problems leaving the resident population confused and frustrated. A unitary authority for greater Norwich, we are convinced, would provide more clarity, simplify bureaucracy and prevent duplication

And finally, from a completely selfish perspective, we have spent many years developing the very satisfactory relationships that we now have with the City Council while, although we are regularly consulted by the County Council on matters to do with highways, the fire service and waste management, we appear to be completely unknown and unrecognised by the County Council as a whole.

Conclusion and Recommendation

We therefore strongly believe that, when the Boundary Committee considers the three options it has proposed and asked us to consider, it should firmly reject that to create a single unitary authority for the whole of Norfolk. We also take the view that the option to create a unitary authority out of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft (the so-called wedge) and a second for the rest of Norfolk should be dropped and we **strongly commend the proposal to create a Greater Norwich (the so-called doughnut) and another for the rest of Norfolk and recommend that be chosen as the most sensible solution.**

Julian F Foster
CHAIRMAN

4th September 2008

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4TH September 2008

Review Manager (Norfolk and Suffolk Review)
The Boundary Committee for England
Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 2HW

Dear Sir

Re: Norfolk and Suffolk Review

You have invited submissions from various people and organisations to assist the Boundary Committee for England to come to a decision and make recommendations to the Secretary of State regarding the future local government structures in this part of East Anglia. This Forum has considered what it might contribute to the debate and has prepared the attached Response for the Committee's consideration. We should be grateful to be kept informed of the progress of the on-going discussions and the eventual recommendation made by the Boundary Committee.

Yours faithfully

JULIAN F FOSTER
CHAIRMAN

Central Norwich Citizens' Forum is a company limited by guarantee and registered in England No 4855745 and a charity registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales No 1106226.

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