

Item 4 – District Councillor's Report

On behalf of Cllr. Jill Cleary (the Leader of NFDC) Dist. Cllr. Joe Reilly read an "Open Letter" from her on the Proposed Local Government Re-Organisation plans. The text of the letter is set out below:-

Along with 150+ councils across England, the government has told local authorities in Hampshire they must reorganise into a single tier of local government, meaning fewer, larger authorities in the county, each providing all council services for their area. This means that, with the exception of local town and parish councils, none of the existing councils in Hampshire will exist after April 2028.

Councils in Hampshire are therefore required by the government to submit proposals by the end of September that include the geographical areas new councils would serve. A number of options have been prepared for public and stakeholder engagement. The options for our area are:

OPTION 1: A single new council serving residents and businesses of New Forest, Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire. At NFDC, we strongly support this option, as the only natural fit for our area, our residents and our businesses.

OPTION 2: A single new council serving residents of New Forest, Southampton and Eastleigh. As a council representing a rural area, this is not an option that we can support. There are significant risks, in particular around service design and delivery, environmental sustainability and decision-making impacts on rural communities.

OPTION 3: One new council serving residents of Southampton and Eastleigh along with some New Forest areas including Marchwood, Hythe and Dibden and Fawley at the Waterside, as well as the communities of Totton and Eling. NFDC is strongly opposed to this option as a cynical and greedy land grab.

The public and stakeholder engagement is now live, and I am writing to you as a key stakeholder within the New Forest District Council area, to ask you to please take the opportunity to share your views.

At New Forest District Council, we feel passionately that the natural fit for our residents, communities and businesses in the future is to be represented by a new council that is primarily rural in its footprint – one that serves the people of New Forest alongside those of Test Valley, Winchester and East Hampshire. A new council based on this geography would best serve our environment of rural landscapes, villages and towns, and be able to design services aligned to rural, not inner-city, life.

We strongly believe option 1 gives the best chance of preserving the things we hold so dear about New Forest District, and embraces the similarities we share with Test Valley, East Hampshire and Winchester. Protected and cherished natural landscapes, strong and distinct communities, and a history of close and collaborative working with town and parish councils. It would understand the delicate balance of conservation, sustainable growth and community.

To reject this logical option in favour of the New Forest or any part of it becoming an extension of a city is an affront to the needs of New Forest district residents, businesses and the protected environment here, and shows a complete lack of knowledge or concern for your needs. It is inevitable that, over time, budget allocation decisions and service delivery approaches would focus on the needs of the majority – those living in the city and urban environments, abandoning the needs of those who are currently New Forest residents.

We simply cannot let that happen.

At New Forest District Council, we are making five promises to our residents, businesses and communities:

1. We will do all that we can to preserve what is special about our district now
2. We will work day and night to oppose any option that splits our historic communities or forces us to become a forgotten add-on to an area dominated by city skylines and urban sprawl

3. We will push hard to keep local service delivery truly local, designed around communities, parishes and towns
4. We will fight for the status of our market town and village economy, for our fishers, farmers and foresters, and our Waterside industry –integral to our Forest way of life
5. We will continue to put you, your needs & wishes and the land you hold so dear first in everything we do.

It's really important that you have your say now

[This link](#) takes you to the online survey which is now live. I would strongly encourage you to share your views, and in particular to state your support for option 1, and opposition to options 2 and 3.

We also welcome your thoughts, worries or aspirations on email. You can send these to us at LGR@nfdc.gov.uk. We will make sure that your comments are included.

In addition, you can find more information on our website at <https://www.newforest.gov.uk/lgr>

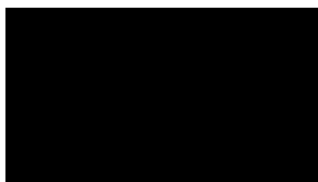
Ultimately, it will be the government who makes this decision, so it is also helpful if you take time to write now to your MP, sharing your strength of feeling about this matter and expressing your support for option 1. You can find details of your MP here:



Lastly, myself or a colleague would be very happy to join any upcoming meetings or events that you are hosting, to share more information about the options and our rationale for supporting option 1. Please do let me know asap if that would be helpful.

The government requires evidence of public engagement from councils within their final proposals in the autumn, so it is vital that the people and businesses of the New Forest demonstrate our strength of feeling about this matter, and do all we can to influence those proposals and help keep the forest whole and secure the natural fit for the New Forest district, its residents and its future.

Best wishes,



Councillor Jill Cleary
Leader of the Council
New Forest District Council