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Years
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Holybrook Parish Council

Proudly serving the residents of Holybrook since 2000

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The Parish Office
Beansheaf Community Centre
Charrington Road
Calcot
Reading RG31 7AW

Tel: 0118 9454339
e-mail: clerk@holybrook-pc.gov.uk
www.holybrook-pc.gov.uk

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steve.reed.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Secretary

Subject: Holybrook Parish Council's Residents' Views on the Proposed Local Government Reorganisation (Ridgeway & Greater Reading)

Holybrook Parish Council writes to formally present the views of its residents regarding the current proposals for local government reorganisation that may result in Holybrook Parish becoming part of either a new *Ridgeway Council* or *Greater Reading Council*.

Following a parish-wide questionnaire, public meeting and public drop-in session, the responses received demonstrate significant concern and uncertainty about both proposals. The overarching message from residents is a strong desire to retain genuinely local governance, access to nearby services and continuity in effective service delivery. The comments received revealed an attachment to our community identity as a suburban area and frustration at the perceived lack of meaningful consultation and clear information on the Local Government Reorganisation proposals at this stage.

Below is a summary of the main themes emerging from residents' responses:

1. Access to Local Services and Community Identity

Residents stressed the importance of accessing services locally. There is concern that both Reading and any newly proposed Ridgeway authority could result in reduced accessibility or unfamiliar service providers.

“Being able to access services locally, not 20+ miles away.”

“I don't want to belong to a Council that doesn't know my area.”

Residents value Holybrook's semi-rural, community-focused character and are concerned about losing parish identity within a large (Ridgeway) or urban (Greater Reading) authority. The Parish Council is widely recognised as playing a vital role in local life and is essential to maintaining local focus and accountability.

2. Concerns About Joining Reading Borough Council

Many residents voiced strong objections to becoming part of Greater Reading, citing higher council tax, urbanisation pressures, concerns over governance and financial management, and a fear that local needs will be overlooked.

“I object in the strongest possible terms to becoming part of Greater Reading.”

“I chose to live in Calcot because it was NOT in Reading’s control.”

“Reading Borough Council are far more expensive and less efficient and have an urban outlook.”

Specific worries include potential impacts on insurance premiums, parking charges and loss of valued West Berkshire benefits, such as the leisure discount subsidy for OAPs.

3. Concerns About the Ridgeway Proposal

While most residents expressed a preference for Ridgeway over Reading, others questioned the practicality and logic of this new authority.

Concerns include:

- The vastness and administrative distance of the new council area
- Uncertainty about where services and headquarters would be based
- Fears that communities on the edge, such as Holybrook, could be “forgotten”
- That the finances of the current Oxfordshire Council’s are unknown and a comparative cannot be made with the alternative option of Reading.

“If the Ridgeway HQ is far away, Calcot might be less well supported.”

“I am concerned with the vastness of the new proposed area of Ridgeway but also don’t want to be part of Reading.”

4. Council Tax, Transport and Waste Services

A recurring theme was concern over potential increases in Council Tax and the cost of transition. Residents fear that reorganisation will lead to higher bills and reduced services.

“That our Council Tax does not go up if we join Reading.”

“That Council Tax doesn’t go up to cover all this!”

Residents also raised concerns about retaining access to the Padworth Recycling Centre and services such as local bus routes. Maintaining local recycling facilities and affordable transport options are essential.

5. Governance, Consultation, Transparency and Costs

Residents expressed scepticism about the motives behind the proposals and the lack of good information:

“Why, when there was no directive from Government, has WBC sought out this reorganisation?”

Although there has been interaction from both district councils, the overwhelming feeling from residents was confusion over the proposals, concern at the number of questions which could not be fully answered and anxiety that real cost implications remain unknown. This uncertainty has created frustration and a lack of confidence that any reorganisation would deliver tangible benefits to Holybrook residents.

6. Desire for Stability and Continuity

Many responses call for no change, arguing that reorganisation would be a waste of time, money and resources.

“We should stay as we are if possible.”

“This change isn’t required, waste of time, money, and resources.”

“Have always been very happy with West Berks & do NOT want to join Reading.”

Residents generally feel well served by West Berkshire Council and the Parish Council and wish to preserve existing arrangements where possible.

7. Lack of Clarity on Parish Representation under Reading Borough Council

Residents are deeply concerned about the absence of Parish Councils within Reading Borough Council’s structure and that there is no clear guidance on how Greater Reading would work with existing parish councils. It is crucial that local voices are not only represented but genuinely heard.

The Parish Council is central to local democracy in Holybrook, providing immediate, responsive engagement and representing residents’ concerns. Without a clear framework for parish-level governance, residents fear a loss of accountability and influence.

Conclusion

Holybrook residents’ key principles are:

- Value local services and representation that understand their community
- Require transparency and genuine consultation before any decision is taken by the Secretary of State
- Seek protection from higher costs, reduced services or loss of identity
- Many strongly oppose being transferred to Reading Borough Council
- Others question the viability and logic of the proposed Ridgeway Council
- There is a clear need for assurances about local governance and parish representation
- Residents remain concerned about unanswered questions and unknown financial implications

Holybrook Parish Council urges all decision-makers: Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and the Secretary of State to take these local views into full consideration before any structural changes.

We respectfully request that:

1. No reorganisation is imposed without full, independent consultation and impact assessment.
2. Parish Councils are fully engaged in future discussions.
3. Any proposal prioritises accessibility, fairness and community identity above political or financial expediency.
4. Any new governance structure explicitly protects parish representation and community engagement mechanisms.
5. Clear, transparent cost implications and practical impacts must be provided to residents before any changes are implemented.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Tull". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Claire Tull
Chairman
Holybrook Parish Council