

Should Dorney, Dorney Reach and Boveney (Dorney Parish) move from Buckinghamshire to the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead?

Over the years, a number of people in Dorney have asked this question. The recent Government decision to create the Buckinghamshire Unitary Authority, reinvigorates the debate and could be considered by the residents of Dorney, Dorney Reach & Boveney (Dorney Parish) as suggested by the Editor of Dorney Parish News:

Comments on NextDoor (NOV18)

Peter Bowman, Dorney (Editor, Dorney Parish News)

Bucks Unitary Authority

Bucks County Council's proposals that they become a Unitary Authority and effectively abolish our South Bucks District Council and neighbouring bodies like Wycombe DC and Chiltern DC have been approved by the Secretary of State. Judged by previous postings on Next Door, some think this will lead to a more streamlined, cost-efficient local government while some think this will increase the tendency for Dorney to be a backwater in the far south of the county ruled by a remote authority in Aylesbury. What do Dorney residents think now the decision has been taken?

Roz Smith, Dorney

I can understand that it will mean serious cost-saving and support this. However, I do feel that Dorney is geographically a long way from Aylesbury and while it will be clearer as to who we need to contact for what, we are still a long way away. There was talk of local hubs, but no one has said how these would work.

Here is a paragraph from James Brokenshire's announcement, giving his opinion and asking if he should modify the proposal.

Whilst I am clear that the single unitary proposal fully meets the three criteria, I recognise that some have questioned whether such a structure might weaken local democratic engagement at the most local level. To help reassure any who might be concerned on this, I intend to speak with the five councils to determine whether I should modify the proposal before implementing it, in relation to councillor numbers, perhaps providing for three-member electoral wards. I will also expect the new unitary council, and in the meantime the existing councils, to engage with their local communities about the appropriate arrangements for civic representation for towns and parishes. I similarly expect the councils to promote and help support the development of neighbourhood plans, as I consider these can be key building blocks for the successful implementation of change in Buckinghamshire that residents deserve.

Peter Bowman, Dorney

Thanks Roz - that is most interesting and helpful. Perhaps we can get their perspective on these issues from any or all our local representatives at parish, district and county level in the first issue of Dorney Parish News in the New Year.

Roz Smith, Dorney

Good idea. When is the print deadline?

Virginia Silvester, Dorney

I don't think the number of councillors we have will make any difference to the level of service we receive. Personally, I would prefer to become part of Windsor and Maidenhead, with whom we have closer local links and more affinity than with remote Aylesbury. At least they maintain their roads better! Dorney did of course used to be part of Eton Rural District.

Teresa McGUINNESS, Dorney

I agree, after all we have a Maidenhead postcode and we could do with safer roads, there are so many potholes.

Joan Griffith, Dorney

I absolutely agree. We get very little service from South Bucks/Bucks. Geographically it would make sense to be part of RBWM. As far as I know council tax rates are comparable. The council offices would be near and we would get a residents advantage card.

I use the RBWM library service and for non grocery shopping my first port of call is Windsor.

Virginia Silvester, Dorney

Perhaps we could have a local referendum about this?

Peter Bowman, Dorney

Given the growing feeling that a Unitary Authority based in Aylesbury is not good for us and a parallel interest in links to RBWM, it's ironic to read about the campaign mounted in Dorney and neighbouring villages to resist plans to shift us to Berks in 1974. It's written up in detail on the Dorney History Group website.

Virginia Silvester, Dorney

Different times...

Harman Sidhu, Dorney

Doesn't make sense for us to be moved to Aylesbury, totally agree we need to be part of Windsor & Maidenhead

As this is relevant to the Dorney History Group, I have – over several years – been researching what are the facts, the pros and cons, the precedents and the possible process required to allow the debate to start and progress.

However, it remains unclear how the decision will affect parishes, especially Dorney. Those details are unlikely to become clear for many months, if not years.

This research paper is an attempt to pull some of the information that is available together, from an historical viewpoint, in order to assist a sensible debate on the question “Should Dorney, Dorney Reach and Boveney (Dorney Parish) move from Buckinghamshire to the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead?”. I hope it does that.

Bill Dax

Dorney History Group

December 2018

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Background

The question as to whether Dorney should be in Bucks or Berks was initiated nearly 50 years ago, in 1971.

The details of that discussion, and subsequent ones, may be read on the Dorney History Group website ([Click here](#)) in an article I researched over two years ago when the question of the future of Bucks County Council and Unitary Authorities was developing.

It is unclear as to when the new Unitary Authority will be in place and exactly when the whole process will be completed. It appears that it could take up to five years.

The new [Future Bucks website](#) provides details on their Community Proposals which include:

- Community Boards
- Community Hubs
- A new devolution offer
- Area Planning Committees

There are a considerable number of issues to be addressed over the next five years which will, inevitably, create some uncertainty until resolved.

History & Timeline

The Local Government Act 1894 created Eton Rural District Council which included Dorney and Boveney.

The Local Government Bill 1972, which became law in April 1974, originally proposed that the Eton Rural District would be transferred from Bucks to Berks.

A ferocious battle then ensued, led by Dorney Parish Council, to retain Dorney (and Boveney) in Bucks.

The arguments were, essentially, that Dorney, with others, was a rural community and did not want to be combined in some way with an urban Slough Borough Council. If the choice was between Slough and a new Windsor District – they would opt for Windsor.

Dorney's plight reached the House of Commons on 6th July 1972 when Sir Ronald Bell M.P. for Beaconsfield argued strongly in favour of Dorney remaining in Bucks with his major argument being *"most important, the people of Dorney want to remain in Bucks"*.

Keith Speed M.P supported him with the comment *"This is a marginal case. The people overwhelmingly wish to stay there [in Bucks]. It will not be of any significance to either the new Buckinghamshire or the new Berkshire. Therefore, I advise the House to accept Amendment 56."* The Amendment, No. 56 to keep Dorney in Bucks was agreed by the House and Dorney remained in Buckinghamshire.

The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead (RBWM) was formed on 1 April 1974 and included a large number of rural communities.

In 1985 as part of the Local Boundary Commission Assessment, Berkshire County Council proposed that Dorney, part of Taplow and the Lent Rise Ward of Burnham should be transferred to Berkshire as the area looked to, and was part of, Slough. Berkshire then

extended a suggestion to bring into Berkshire all of South Bucks south of the M4. This was supported at the time by RBWM. It was rejected as *“Dorney was quite different from Slough and had little link with Windsor across the river; this suggested to us that the area [including Dorney] should remain in Buckinghamshire”*.

In 1992 the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead became a Unitary Authority, with considerable financial strength.

Potential Impact on Residents – Pros and Cons

Benefits of staying in Buckinghamshire

It is difficult, given the uncertainty around the Unitary Authority, to list any benefits. However, to date, the South Bucks Planning Department have been very helpful in protecting Dorney from planning permissions that would be inappropriate in the Green Belt, with a number of such refusals in recent years.

Benefits of moving to RBWM

Assuming they would agree to it and extend to Dorney the same services etc, they do to Eton Wick residents:

Council Tax

There would be an immediate reduction of around 26% in Dorney residents’ Council Tax. The following rates (using 2018/19 current rates) would apply:

Current Eton/Dorney Council Tax comparison				
Band	Dorney	Eton	% reduction	£ reduction
A	£1,167.88	£861.30	-26%	£306.58
B	£1,381.74	£1,004.83	-27%	£376.91
C	£1,557.17	£1,148.41	-26%	£408.76
D	£1,751.82	£1,291.95	-26%	£459.87
E	£2,141.12	£1,579.05	-26%	£562.07
F	£2,530.41	£1,866.14	-26%	£664.27
G	£2,919.70	£2,153.24	-26%	£766.46
H	£3,503.64	£2,583.90	-26%	£919.74

This could be slightly reduced by around 2% if the Unitary Authority reduce South Bucks District’s Council Tax down to Wycombe Council’s Council Tax levels as they have indicated they would.

Waste

RBWM currently empty General Waste, Recycling and Food Bins every week (not Garden Waste which is fortnightly).

South Bucks currently empties General Waste and Recycling Bins fortnightly. The Food Bin is emptied weekly.

The Garden Waste Bin currently costs £35 p.a. in both Councils

[RBWM Yellow Advantage Card \(Resident\)](#)

These are for Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead residents (Royal Borough council tax payers) **free of charge**.

Children can get an advantage card as soon as they start being charged for leisure centre activities (e.g from three months old with baby swimming classes).

Benefits include:

- Free access to Windsor Castle
- Discounted Car Parking
- LEGOLAND 50% discount on Day Tickets
- [13 pages of Advantage Card discounts \(Click here\)](#)

[South Bucks – RBWM Blue Advantage Card \(Non Resident\)](#)

These are for non-residents and available for an annual fee.

If you work within the Royal Borough, there are 50% discounts on these fees if you and four of your colleagues wish to join the scheme. Blue non-resident cards **do not cover free entry into Windsor Castle or car-parking discounts**. They can only be issued at Leisure Centres.

- Adult: £32.00
- Family (2 adults, 3 children): £46.25
- Junior: £9.25
- Over 60 / disabled: £8.00

[Broadband](#)

Whilst Bucks & Herts Broadband (Connected Counties) provided some assistance towards improving broadband speeds in Dorney, there are still some parts of the Parish that are not able to receive >20Mbps speeds whilst others can.

Superfast Berkshire is the equivalent organisation for RBWM and they are extremely active with Gigaclear (not BT) in ensuring that superfast broadband is quickly implemented throughout Berkshire, including the Windsor area.

[Crime and Policing](#)

Thames Valley Police is the police force in both Councils, so no change there.

Links with neighbours

The argument was made, back in 1972 and in 1985, that Dorney had little connection with Windsor “across the river”.

The opposite case could be made today – not only for Windsor but also for Eton Wick and Eton. The development of the centre of Maidenhead has seen an increase in footfall – possibly some more from Dorney.

It is questionable today whether Dorney residents feel so closely tied to Burnham, Taplow or Aylesbury.

The driving distances to Windsor & Maidenhead Council offices are considerably less than to Aylesbury Council offices:

RBWM Offices: Maidenhead	– 4 miles, 10 minutes
RBWM Offices: Windsor	– 5 miles, 15 minutes
Bucks County Council Offices: Aylesbury	– 30 miles, 60 minutes

Postal Addresses

All of the properties in Dorney have postal addresses that end either with Windsor, Berkshire or Maidenhead, Berkshire.

Finances: RBWM v Bucks

It is difficult to find “apples to apples” comparisons of the financial strengths of the two councils.

There was an assessment of the Bucks CC (BCC) finances by the opposing Labour group in Wycombe from a few years ago which is included in Appendix A.

There does not appear to be a similar “independent” assessment on RBWM’s finances.

The financial effect of Dorney leaving Bucks and joining RBWM – Council Tax

The approximate income from Council Tax that Bucks CC & SBDC received from Dorney in 2018/19 was approx. £550,000 (exc. Police, Fire, Parish etc).

The approximate additional income from Council Tax that RBWM would receive from Dorney would be around £400,000 (exc. Police, Fire, Parish etc) in today’s prices.

Possible benefits that Dorney could seek from RBWM

Effectively, RBWM would receive an additional “windfall” income of £400,000 p.a in perpetuity. The incremental costs of absorbing Dorney would be relatively small, in comparison.

Consequently, it could be sensible for Dorney to seek some benefits if this transfer took place. Such benefits might include improved road surfacing throughout the parish and financial support for the traffic calming measures requested by 183 petitioners in 2016, amongst other projects.

Local Governance

Member of Parliament

Dorney's MP will likely change from (today) Dominic Grieve to Adam Alfriyie (Windsor) and not Theresa May (Maidenhead)

Ward

Dorney Parish would leave the Burnham Lent Rise & Taplow Ward (South Bucks) and probably join the Eton Wick Ward of RBWM.

Dorney is considerably smaller than the Eton Wick Ward (pop. 2,260 - 2011 Census) as Dorney's population is approx. 750. The Eton Wick Ward is the smallest of all RBWM Wards. If Dorney joined the Eton Wick Ward, it could be renamed the "Eton Wick and Dorney Ward", thus Dorney would regain the lost Dorney name compared to the current Ward name.

Parish

Our Parish would likely remain as Dorney Parish.

Our Parish Council would likely consist, as now, of seven members.

The Process of Change

Precedent

The most recent precedent to a move of territory from Bucks to another County was in 1994 when the Iver (Colnbrook) ward of South Bucks was abolished and transferred from Buckinghamshire (South Bucks) to Berkshire (Slough) through [The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Surrey \(County Boundaries\) Order 1994](#) along with parts of Surrey. As can be seen, this is a fairly simple Order.

The Local Government Boundary Commission

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The Commission is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

The Commission is able to carry out reviews [such as Dorney's county] on request by Councils. The Commission is currently carrying out an electoral review of Windsor and Maidenhead and is in the final stages. The previous review involving RBWM was in 2001.

The Dorney Parish Boundary

If a review was initiated, an argument could be made to change the northern boundary of Dorney Parish to the M4.

Another argument could be made to change the southwest boundary of Slough Borough so that the Manor Farm land from Dorney Common to the Jubilee River reverted to Dorney Parish.

Possible Next Steps

- A possible process might be:
 - A group of residents could ask Dorney Parish Council to agree to a formal consultation on the subject amongst residents.
 - If Dorney Parish Council agrees to do this, they could approach RBWM to determine whether they would support the proposal and assist the Parish Council in the process. Without considerable support from RBWM, this will not happen
 - RBWM is in the final stages of a lengthy review by the LGBCE considering the number of councillors required, amongst other things. It is possible that they would not want to initiate another LGBCE review in the near future.
 - However, if the answer from RBWM is positive, Dorney Parish Council could consult formally with residents and ask for their vote – Remain or Leave. For the vote to carry sufficient weight, it could need over 80% turnout with over 80% voting Leave or Remain.
 - If Leave, proceed with discussions with RBWM to obtain their advice on the process and necessary actions.
 - If Remain, stop all discussions and accept the democratic vote.

It appears that one of the strongest arguments supporting a Leave motion was stated, twice, in Parliament on 6th July 1972:

“most important, the people of Dorney want to remain in Bucks”. Sir Ronald Bell. MP
“The people overwhelmingly wish to stay there. It will not be of any significance to either the new Buckinghamshire or the new Berkshire.” Keith Speed. MP

These statements would appear to support the fact that, whatever the will of the Dorney “people”, that should be sufficient to carry the day.

Another referendum anybody?

Appendix A

Comments taken from the Labour for Wycombe website in 2017.

Whether these are accurate or not is unclear as the information on most of these points is no longer available.

There does not appear to be any comparable, independent information on RBWM.

Facts

1. BCC performs two basic functions for the residents of the county: it delivers services in specific areas (including health, education, transport and children's services) and it manages a portfolio of county assets that includes infrastructure and other long term commitments.
2. In both areas, it is performing poorly. BCC has been overspending on services (running a deficit) year on year on year, despite making significant cuts.
3. In 2015/6 it overspent by over £21million: in 2014/15 it overspent by over £40million.
4. At the same time, BCC has consistently run down the net asset position of the county: between 2011 and 2015 the balance sheet saw a reduction from £660million to £450million. The year to March 2016 showed a slight balance sheet improvement (to £517million), but this was driven by a technical adjustment and masks a significant reduction in 'useable reserves'.
5. On 31st May [2017], BCC will have to pay out £180 million which is the final instalment of its contribution to the Energy from Waste (EfW) disposal facility at Greatmoor. This facility, built at BCC expense, will be run by FCC Environment for 30 years and promises to deliver net savings of £5million per year in the cost of processing waste. However, these savings will depend on the facility providing economies of scale by filling around 2/3 of its capacity with waste from outside the county, something which many experts doubt. Up to £90million of the £180million payment due on May 31st will be funded by additional borrowing; the rest will come from reductions in reserves.
6. BCC has been supportive of the central government's austerity programs, accepting additional reductions in the revenue support grant it receives every year. The reductions in 2014/15 and 2015/16 were 7% and 13.5% respectively. The reduction for the current year [2016/17] is expected to be 20.5% and close to 25% in each of the next three years.
7. BCC has been seeking to plug the gap in its operating budget by speculative investment i.e. by using capital reserves and borrowed capital to invest in commercial activities that will generate a profit. This approach allows them to sidestep regulations that prohibit the use of capital assets to fund operating costs.
8. Examples of these investments include the EfW plant and the recent acquisition of an Equestrian Centre. In both these cases, the 'yield' (percentage of savings or profit) is less than the cost of borrowing, so the net impact will be reductions in BCC's balance sheet.

9. The BCC portfolio that most obviously demonstrates the impact of these policies on our county is transport, and in particular our highway network. By BCC's own calculations, the backlog in road maintenance currently stands somewhere in the range £75million to £150million. Each year, net new damage to the highway network is in the range £10million - £14million, depending on the severity of the winter. Over recent years, net spending on road maintenance has been around £15million and this is set to fall to £10 million from next year. At the current rate of spend, we are taking between £1million and £5million off the backlog each year: in other words, it will take us between 15 and 150 years to catch up. At the new rate of spend, we will never catch up.
10. A national re-evaluation of infrastructure assets will impact BCC by revaluing the highway network from £340million to £9.1billion. This will provide an equity boost to the balance sheet, making it easier for BCC to borrow (and so continue on its current strategy).

Our opinion of BCC's financial management

1. BCC is financially incompetent – grossly so. It has progressively run down the assets of the county, while also overseeing the biggest reductions in services we've seen in 60 years.
2. The Government's creative accounting in re-evaluating the roads allows the Council to drastically lower its ratio of overspend to assets. However, the evaluation is purely notional – how the asset of a road network could ever be "realised" is impossible to guess.
3. Speculating with borrowings, which are secured on a rapidly degrading highway system, will saddle future generations with massive debts. It is reckless. Comparisons with the Enron debacle of 15 years ago are hard to avoid.
4. BCC is irresponsible in its management of capital. Among the most critical assets backed by its shrinking (but soon to be boosted by the highway revaluation) balance sheet is BCC's pension fund. The value of BCC's pension fund liability currently exceeds the net balance sheet position. It will be of little consolation to BCC staff, past and present, to know that their pension fund is supported by a notional revaluation of the A413.
5. BCC's track record on making sound investments is poor. For example, the business case for investing in the EfW plant – (spending £180 million now to save £150 million over 30 years) does not stack up. Meanwhile Bucks will become the dustbin for the region. New borrowing is at 3% interest, existing borrowing (which totaled £164million in March 2016) is at an average interest rate of nearly 6% - the business plan for the EfW plant represents a return of 2.7% at best – whichever way you look at it, BCC would have been better using its reserves to pay down existing debt.
6. Risks have been very poorly considered – for example, experts in the waste disposal and recycling sector expect the UK to have a surplus in incineration capacity by 2019. There is a high probability that extra capacity expected to be filled from out of county will never be filled, which will eliminate the economies of scale and so the savings to

BCC. Were that to happen, we will have constructed a £180million white elephant - money that could have been invested in core services and highway maintenance.

7. We do not believe it makes sense for BCC to act as though it is an investment bank or hedge fund manager. It lacks the capacity and expertise in this area and is contrary to current policies that devolve risk to businesses.
8. We believe that BCCs role is to represent voters, manage our infrastructure and provide services, not to undertake risky speculation with the county's scarce resources.