



Saddleworth White Rose Society

In the County of York

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In an attempt to give each voter an equal representation on their administrative council, the whole electoral system ensures that each ward in an electoral area i.e. "Unitary Authority" has an approximately equal number of residents. This is fine, provided each ward is similar in character and density but fails miserably where there is a great difference in population density, character and requirements of the different populations, as in the case of Saddleworth within the OMB administrative area

The requirements, needs and problems, of a rural area, though equally important to its residents, are totally different to those of urban areas. Particularly in terms of planning, land use and protection of the character of the area and countryside, from schemes not in the interests of the local community. Saddleworth has nine councillors, for a largely rural area making up 53% of the borough, out of a total of sixty councillors on the OMB Council, the rest represent the remaining 47% of the borough. With this urban-rural imbalance it is difficult to see how Saddleworth can be treated fairly or with impartiality and can therefore never be fairly represented in a largely urban authority, under this system.

To base the number of councillors on the size of an area regardless of its population density would be equally unfair, in this case to the urban areas and so it is unlikely that a satisfactory balance can ever be achieved.

This difference, and wish to remain rural, the fear of overdevelopment, inappropriate planning and expected lack of understanding are some of the reasons why 90% of Saddleworth's people voted against joining the OMB thirty two years ago and these fears appear to have been well founded.

There are several other examples of this miss match throughout the south pennines, where rural areas are attached to old industrial towns with nothing in common and very disadvantageous to the communities of the rural areas. It is all very well for the metropolitan boroughs to allow the development of executive type housing to raise finance for the borough, create waste tips fill villages with retirement flats etc. whilst centralising facilities in the urban areas but this does nothing for the rural areas or its people.

The logical solution to this problem would be a South Pennines Borough, similar to the nearby and functional, High Peak Borough and made up of these rural areas and administered by councillors elected from districts with much more in common and similar concerns and problems and therefore with a more balanced, knowledgeable and fairer council. This would not only be more in the interest of the rural residents but would free urban councillors to concentrate on urban problems with which they are more familiar and would almost certainly give more appreciation of and protection to, the rural environment which is precious and irreplaceable. One thing is certain, to remain in the OMB will destroy Saddleworth as we know it as is clearly being demonstrated.

COUNTY WATCH

County Watch, the organisation who recently, carefully removed the misleading county boundary signs, from the middle of Lancashire and placed them on the correct County Boundary, to the apparent great pleasure of the majority of the people of that county, recently wrote to Lancashire administrative Council requesting, under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, a copy of the Committee report which preceded that council's decision to erect the signs. Not surprisingly a reply came back to say that this decision, was not taken by a committee. Presumably then, the decision was taken by "a public servant!", one of the council staff, without LCC approval. An apparently typical case of a council's policy being decided behind closed doors!

OMB Council's "NEWSPAPER"

In May 2003, SWRS wrote to OMB council requesting a meeting between various interested groups, to discuss a change of title to the borough magazine, which we feel is most inappropriate, to something more imaginative and inclusive. We received a very encouraging response saying that the council had already considered this and agreed the title was not contributing to cohesiveness [throughout the borough] and that "You can rest assured that this is an issue we will deal with as quickly as possible".

Having received no further correspondence by October of that year we wrote again and were again informed that a meeting was to be convened between interested parties and that we would be given details in the near future.

Having still heard nothing by May 2004, SWRS arranged a meeting between several interested groups from across the borough, inviting OMBC's, then Chairman of Diversity & Community Cohesion Committee to chair the meeting, to which he agreed. However although we sent details including time, place and date, he did not arrive, nor did we receive an apology. As it happened, another OMB councillor, who had attended on behalf of another group stood in as chairman.

A constructive meeting of these borough-wide groups followed, agreeing that a name change was desirable and suggestions were put forward. A title, "Pennine Way" we all agreed, was more acceptable and inclusive.

This suggestion was passed onto OMB council, by the chairman of the meeting but was apparently turned down, although we received no written notification of the reasons. A poll was eventually held in the council newspaper, in late 2005, which received little response, probably a reflection of the amount of readership that publication attracts. Although a majority were in favour of a change of title, this was apparently ignored because of the poor response from the readership.

We were informed that "Based on the very small response from readers as to whether there should be a name change (you will be aware that the publication is distributed to all 92,00 households in the Borough)" we have left this matter under review. OMB's parenthesis. So much for OMB's promise quote, "You can rest assured that this is an issue we will deal with as quickly as possible".

Like groups in other towns and districts across this unitary authority we feel that to brand all of us Oldhamers is most unfair and whilst no disrespect is intended to the people of that town, although we may live in the OMB administrative area we do not live in that town and we are not Oldhamers. Each area has its own identity of which it is rightly proud and just because the interim council of 1974 decided to prefix the title of the borough with the name of the town of Oldham, does not make us into Oldhamers and our identity should not be disregarded.

We may reluctantly share the same administrative authority as that town but we have our own identities in each area, and no attempt should be made to rob us of these.

The telephone directory

As you have probably noticed the Huddersfield & District telephone directory does not, at least for the moment, include Saddleworth telephone numbers. We are informed that while a study of telephone directories of all areas is being carried out districts will only be included in one directory. If you wish to see Saddleworth telephone numbers included in future issues of the Huddersfield & District directory, so that you can receive a copy of this instead of the North Manchester one, ring 0800 838 400 and let them know. The more people who ring, the more notice may be taken.

A Matter of Identity

We have recently sent several letters to OMBC, the administrative authority to which Saddleworth has since 1974, found itself involuntarily but forcibly shackled, asking for the misuse of the term "Oldham" when referring to other townships within the borough, to be curtailed, has so far met with some hostility from our bureaucratic "servants". Pointing out that places outside the town of Oldham, although within the same misnamed Metropolitan Borough, are not parts of that town and have an identity of their own. To attempt to manipulate this identity is unacceptable. Take the imaginary title Chadderton Metropolitan Borough for example. If this had been the name given to the borough which administers Saddleworth, and it could just as easily have been, would you consider yourself a Chaddertonian? I doubt it, most Saddleworth people wouldn't and probably not many from other parts of the borough would. So why, just because a group of urban based councillors, with either selfish ideas or limited forethought, back in 1974, chose to prefix the title of the borough with the name of the town of Oldham, just one of several towns within the administrative area, should anyone expect the people of the rest of the borough to embrace the name Oldhamer? Especially as each town and district has its own identity. Yet this is what the OMB council has promoted over the last thirty two years, a "were all Oldhamer's now" philosophy. A typical OMB council leaflet in circulation around the borough, giving the impression that the borough is part of Oldham rather than the opposite, was chosen, as an example, its errors underlined and sent with an explanatory letter to OMBC

The bureaucrats claimed that everyone clearly understands the difference and that there is no confusion caused by these leaflets. So it was decided, after pointing out that their own staff were confused, to put this claim to the test and see if the OMBC staff at the Civic Centre and other associated departments questioned, do understand the make up of the borough or the difference between OMB and Oldham the town. All staff were extremely polite and helpful, some were extremely sure and confident but all were extremely wrong.

Without exception they believed that the whole borough is part of Oldham, the town, all thought the real county boundaries had been abolished or that the whole 53% of the borough which is in Yorkshire, had been moved into Lancashire. Some thought because OMB comes under the former administrative county of Greater Manchester, that the real historical county boundaries had been abolished, this is not the case. Also the boundaries of Oldham the town, are clearly marked and are not the same as the boundaries of Oldham Metropolitan Borough.

Support your local food retailers and local food producers.

Saddleworth is a rural area it's farmers and growers produce excellent, high quality fresh produce, virtually right on your doorstep, not produce that has travelled halfway round the world and in some cases been produced in below standard, unhygienic, low welfare conditions. Milk, cream, eggs, beef, lamb, bacon, pork and honey are all produced from healthy well cared for stock bred and reared on Saddleworth farms, with high standards of animal husbandry and welfare, by these custodians of the countryside. In many cases this produce can be delivered fresh to your door, directly from it's source of origin.

There are also a wealth of high quality local grocers, bakers, green grocers and butchers, in most of the villages. Regrettably some villages are noticeably short of shops but the only way to ensure the continued existence of these high quality retailers, we are fortunate enough to still have, is to purchase their produce. They are not there to decorate the villages even though they do look far better than supermarkets.