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Proposals for local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

I am making this submission to the consultation on *Proposals for local government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough* on behalf of the Association of British Counties (ABC), an unincorporated association which promotes the importance of the 92 historic counties of the UK to our nation's heritage and culture. We are delighted that the Government shares our view of the importance of the historic counties to our history and our sense of identity and community^[1].

The main threat to the identities of the historic counties is their confusion with local government. Hence, although ABC has no views on the structures of local government, we firmly believe that local government terminology and council names should be chosen so as to draw a clear distinction between local government and the historic counties.

Given these concerns, our response addresses Item 4(d) of the consultation's *Criteria for unitary local government*:

"Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance."

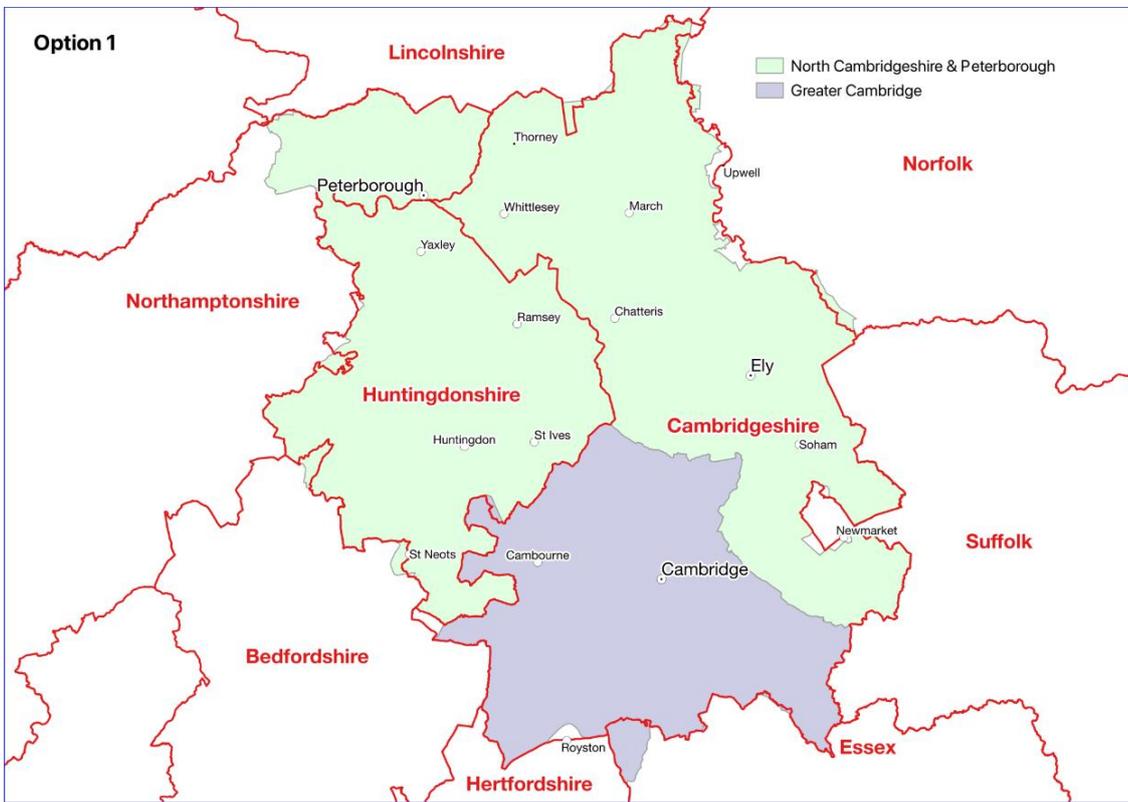
None of the 10 consultation questions refers specifically to Item 4(d). Hence, our response most accurately lies within the *"any other comment you have on this proposal"* of Question 8.

ABC considers that none of the four proposed unitary local government set-ups presented by the consultation document adequately considers issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance, in so far as some of the proposed names for the new unitary councils are in direct conflict with the historic county identities of the areas concerned.

The use of the unqualified name '*Cambridgeshire*' to describe the current Cambridgeshire County Council area has long been a source of confusion and irritation since this area includes most of Huntingdonshire. The lieutenancy area of '*Cambridgeshire*' also includes the Soke of Peterborough area of Northamptonshire. This confusing and regrettable situation stems from the Local Government Act 1972 and the "*counties*" it created on 1st April 1974.

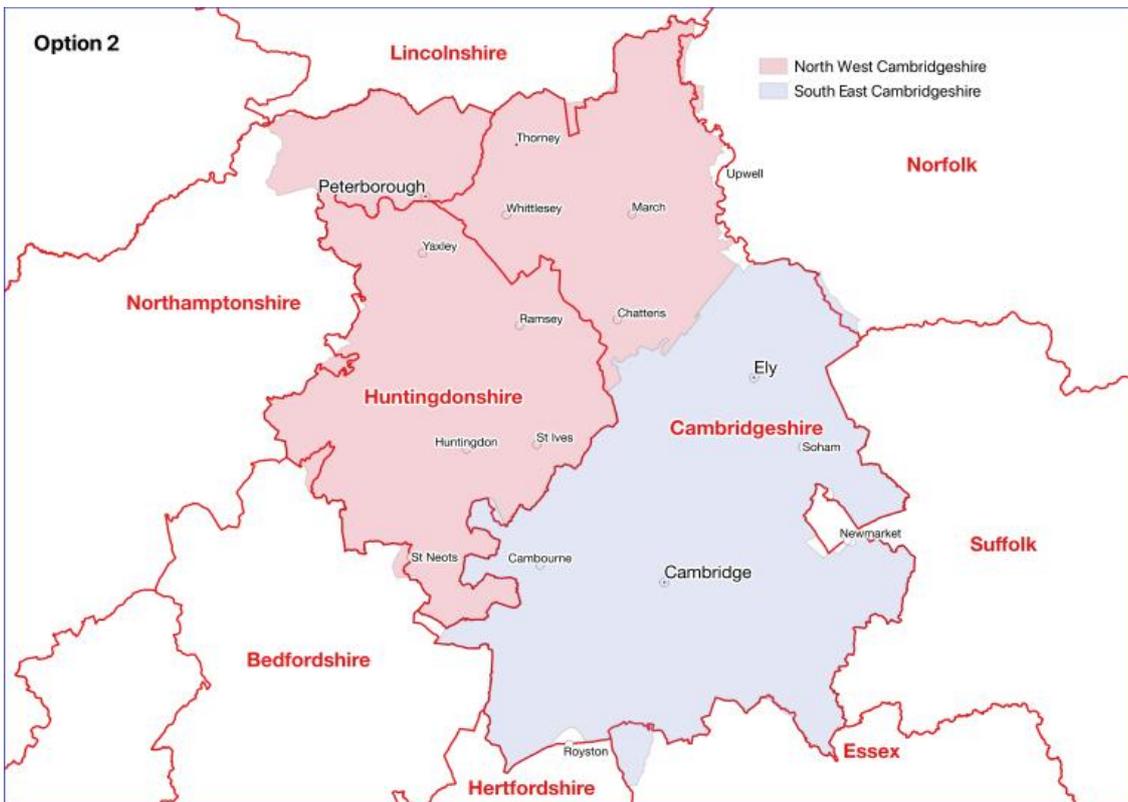
The current local government reorganisation provides a great opportunity to finally deal with this misapplication of the '*Cambridgeshire*' name to Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough. This could easily be done by choosing names for the new councils which properly reflect the local identities and culture of these areas. The lieutenancies should be re-appointed to the historic counties.

We make suggestions below in relation to appropriate council names for all four of the options presented in the consultation.



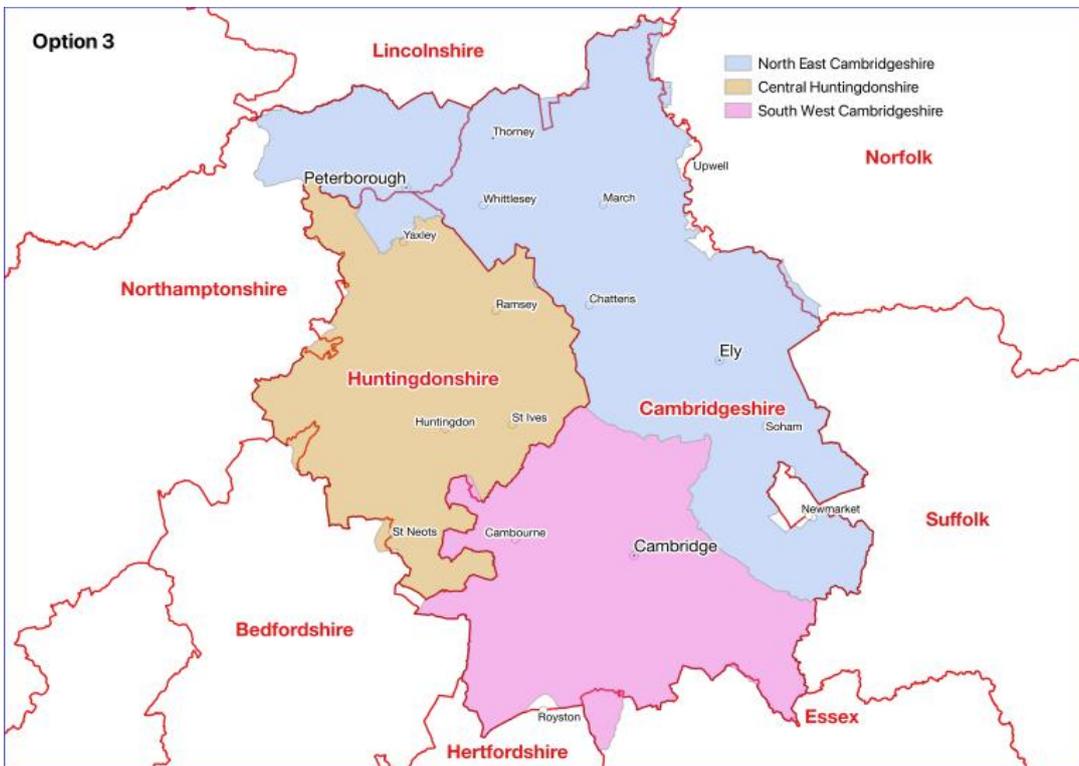
The council areas proposed in Option 1 compared to the historic counties

- The name “*North Cambridgeshire and Peterborough*” is wholly inappropriate for a council area that includes the whole of Huntingdonshire. The name “*North Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Huntingdonshire*” would be appropriate.
- We have no issue with “*Greater Cambridge*”, but suggest “*South Cambridgeshire*” is better.



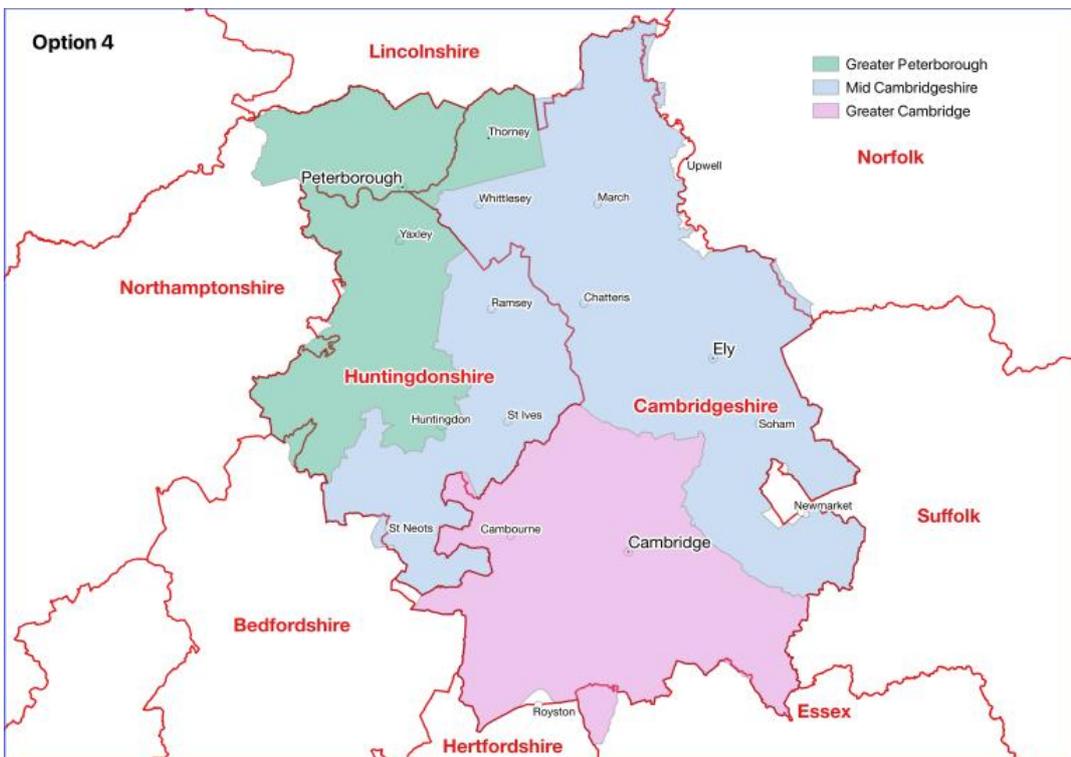
The council areas proposed in Option 2 compared to the historic counties

- “*North West Cambridgeshire*” would be an outrageous name for a council area that includes Huntingdonshire and the Soke of Peterborough. “*Peterborough, Huntingdonshire and Fenland*” or “*Peterborough, Huntingdonshire and North Cambridgeshire*” are better alternatives.
- “*Southern Cambridgeshire*” would be a better name than “*South East Cambridgeshire*”.



The council areas proposed in Option 3 compared to the historic counties

- The name “*North East Cambridgeshire*” is inappropriate for a council area that includes the Soke of Peterborough. The name “*East Cambridgeshire and Peterborough*” is far better.
- “*Central Huntingdonshire*” covers most of the county. It could be just “*Huntingdonshire*”.
- “*South West Cambridgeshire*” is fine, although “*South Cambridgeshire*” would be better.



The council areas proposed in Option 4 compared to the historic counties

- The name “*Greater Peterborough*” is inappropriate for an area which includes half of Huntingdonshire. A better name would be “*Peterborough and West Huntingdonshire*”.
- The name “*Mid Cambridgeshire*” is inappropriate for an area which includes the other half of Huntingdonshire. “*East Cambridgeshire and East Huntingdonshire*” is better.
- ABC has no issue with “*Greater Cambridge*”, although “*South Cambridgeshire*” is better.

The consultation notably makes no mention of the Government's intentions in relation to the 'Cambridgeshire' lieutenancy. The opportunity should be taken to recast the Cambridgeshire lieutenancy to cover just the historic county. The Northamptonshire lieutenancy should be expanded to cover the Soke of Peterborough. A lieutenancy of Huntingdonshire should be created. This should be done as part of a wider move to re-appoint the lieutenancies to the historic counties throughout the UK (see below).

As part of this reorganisation, Government should replace the terms 'county' and 'county council' within local government terminology and parlance with 'council area' and 'council', as used in Scotland. Council names should take the form "South Cambridgeshire Council". This would ensure that local government has an identity distinct from the historic counties.

Clearing the confusion with local government could be backed up by two further measures to strengthen official recognition for the importance of the historic counties:

- Including a definition of 'historic county' within the Interpretation Act 1978 would ensure the consistent use of the historic counties across Government, its agencies and within the heritage sector. The definition used by the Office for National Statistics is ideal^[2,3].
- Appointing the lieutenancies of England^[4] to the historic counties, as are many lieutenancies in Scotland^[5] would be a suitable official recognition of the importance of both the historic counties and the office of lord lieutenant.

Our *Historic Counties of the United Kingdom Bill*^[6] details the small legislative changes which would be necessary to implement these measures.

Many thanks for giving us the opportunity to express our views on the ongoing local government reorganisation. We trust that you will give these views your due consideration.

Yours sincerely

Peter Boyce

Peter Boyce
Chairman, Association of British Counties

NOTES

[1] Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019, *Celebrating the historic counties of England*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/celebrating-the-historic-counties-of-england/celebrating-the-historic-counties-of-england>

[2] Office for National Statistics, 2024, *Index of Place Names in Great Britain*

<https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/208d9884575647c29f0dd5a1184e711a/about>

[3] Historic Counties Trust, 2022, *Historic Counties Standard*,

https://www.historiccountiestrust.co.uk/Historic_Counties_Standard.pdf

[4] Association of British Counties, 2022, The lieutenancies of England and their relation to the historic counties

https://gazetteer.org.uk/ABC_Fact_Sheet_Lieutenancy_Areas_England.pdf

[5] Association of British Counties, 2022, The lieutenancies of Scotland and their relation to the historic counties

https://gazetteer.org.uk/ABC_Fact_Sheet_Lieutenancy_Areas_Scotland.pdf

[6] Association of British Counties, 2025, *Historic Counties of the United Kingdom Bill*

https://gazetteer.org.uk/ABC_Historic_Counties_of_the_UK_Bill.pdf