

Local Government Boundary Review Widcombe Association Submission

Local Government Boundary Review

Widcombe Association Submissions

Introduction

1. The Widcombe Association (WA) is Bath's largest community association, including residents, businesses, public institutions and charities. A non-political organisation, we have been actively in existence for many decades, with a clear constitution, elected committee and a minimum of two general meetings of members each year. We made submissions with respect to the Commission's initial consultation seeking views on new wards.
2. The WA is very disappointed by the Commission's current draft recommendations, and now submit our objections together with suggested modifications aimed at achieving the Commission's stated considerations.
3. Although more locally focussed, we see our submission as complementing and consistent with the broader comments made by the Bath City Forum and Federation of Bath Residents' Associations.

Objections to the Current Draft Recommendations

4. The Commission's stated main considerations are to:
 - Improve electoral equality by equalising the number of electors each councillor represents*
 - Reflect community identity*
 - Provide for effective and convenient local government.*
5. The current draft recommendations essentially achieve the first consideration but fail the other two.
6. A comparison between the existing and draft recommended Widcombe Ward boundaries (plans below), coupled with extensive personal local knowledge, points to the following.
7. Historic Widcombe is proposed to be split into 5 wards. This is unacceptable and flies in the face of a strong community identity and cohesion.
8. Widcombe Village, including in and around Widcombe Manor would be split from Widcombe Ward and relocated in Claverton Down. The eponymous Widcombe Manor is more than an address but, through the generosity of successive occupants, its grounds have long hosted Widcombe events (most recently, as every year, on New Year's Day).
9. St Thomas a Becket Church (close by Widcombe Manor) is both a local place of worship and provides a venue for other Widcombe based events. It is part of a joint benefice "Widcombe St Thomas and St Matts" with complementary services (more traditional at St Thomas and more contemporary at St Matts) under a single incumbent and with active Church Wardens involved with both. As now proposed they would have to look to different councillors with respect to issues affecting either or both churches.
10. The large secondary Beechen Cliff School bounds houses along much of Greenway Lane, inevitably with consequent issues arising. Under the draft recommendations, residents and school would, however, be served by different councillors, greatly complicating communication and mediation.
11. Widcombe Infant and Junior CoE Schools (notwithstanding their name) would no longer be in Widcombe Ward, despite being very much part of the Widcombe community with close links with the Widcombe Benefice as above.
12. Several key roads would be split. Prior Park/Ralph Allen's Drive (A3062) is a major thoroughfare and largely residential: under the current proposals residents and others

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would need to liaise with different councillors depending their address with respect to matters such as traffic speed, road safety and parking.

13. Widcombe Hill is another busy traffic route that would similarly be artificially split, even though issues such as traffic speed tend to be common along its length.
14. Other locations would be illogically severed rather than split. Perrymead, for example, is a vehicular cul-de-sac and a pedestrian cul-de-sac for all but the fittest. (The most southerly length at Fox Hill is unmade and precipitously steep). For practical purposes Perrymead has no connection to Combe Down. Perrymead residents would no longer be able to reach their polling station other than by a lengthy car journey breaching the Commission's "internal connectivity" criterion.
15. Likewise residents of Lyncombe Vale Road, Lyncombe Vale and Greenway Lane have no connection with somewhere called 'Lyncombe' although that is where they would be relocated. In practice, residents here view themselves as living in Widcombe, which is where they overwhelmingly look to socialise, shop and of course to vote. Yet they would be relocated, facing a lengthy and difficult route to reach the normal polling station serving the current Lyncombe Ward, and it is difficult to visualise any better location.
16. Dolemeads residents would find themselves in an amorphous Bathwick Ward despite living practically on top the Widcombe Schools, shopping parade and Social Club.
17. Lime Grove area residents would find themselves living in Bathwick Ward despite being severed from it by the Kennet and Avon Canal. Again the internal connectivity criterion would be breached. The fairly recent residential development at the northern end of Lime Grove already suffers this problem and should (as previously suggested) be relocated into Widcombe.
18. Not only do the current recommendations provide a very poor fit with people's understanding of the geography of this part of Bath, the outcome would also significantly erode the efficient working of the Council, generating additional meetings and communications between individuals, organisations, Council Members and officers.

World Heritage Site

19. Bath is a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS), one of only two complete cities so designated (the other being Venice). WHS designations acknowledge that a location has "Universal Values", which for Bath include the close and intermingling relationship between the city, its countryside setting and skyline. This is nowhere more evident than in Widcombe, indeed the WA strapline is "where the city meets the countryside". As well as being important for its own sake, this Universal Value brings benefits and enjoyment to those living across the city as well as to visitors from across the world. Safeguarding this requires sensitivity to competing needs, including development needs, with constructive engagement between public, private and voluntary organisations. Fragmenting the area politically would make its management much more problematic for all concerned.

Proposed Revisions to the Draft Recommendations

20. Claverton Down makes no sense as a ward: it should be abandoned with areas returned to Bathwick, Combe Down and Widcombe Wards. We feel the position of the University has skewed the recommendations. We suggest the University should remain with Bathwick – the area to which it has closest connection. This also enables residents to the east of the railway to return to their more natural area of Widcombe.
21. Combe Down should not absorb Perrymead, for the reasons above, but should retain those parts of Combe Down Village currently envisaged as going to Claverton (it seems unexpected to split Combe Down village in two). Lyncombe and Widcombe should be combined as a two-member ward, overcoming the splitting and severance problems

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outlined above. Wellsway should be the boundary below Bear Flat, areas east of Wellsway remaining in Widcombe as they have little connection with Oldfield Ward.

22. Bear Flat has an effective and active identity, which could be readily retained whether or not this locality (and South Quays) were included within Widcombe in the interests of electoral equality. WA would not oppose either but continue to engage constructively with those areas.
23. Our suggested modifications to the Commission's draft recommendations are shown on Table 1 below, demonstrating how this achieves broadly equal elector numbers per councillor in the relevant new wards.

Table of Proposed changes based on 2017 electoral register

Proposed Area	Widcombe & Lyncombe	Bathwick	Combe Down	Claverton Down	Oldfield Park	Comments
Starting - Forecast	2314 (W) 2254 (L)	4491	5134	2278	6845	
University		1288		-1288		Return to Bathwick
Claverton Down Road North/ Claverton Ct/All Saints Place/Quarry Rock Gardens/Clarendon Terrace		196		-196		Return to Bathwick
Widcombe Hill Macauley Buildings Prospect Road	113			-113		Return to Widcombe & Lyncome
Widcombe Old Village Church Street / Lane Prior Park School & NT Crowe Hall	59			-59		Return to Widcombe & Lyncombe
Lime Grove / Pultney Gardens/Grove	74	-74				Return / move to Widcombe & Lyncombe
Houseshoe Walk / Sydney Buildings (part)	150	-150				Move from Bathwick to Widcombe
Dolemeads Ferry Lane / Broadway /Archway St/Excelsior Street /Pultney Road (West) / Caroline Buildings	269	-269				Return to Widcombe & Lyncombe
East of Wellsway Magdalen Avenue / Park Avenue / Westfield Park / Wells Road East side	0				0	230 voters are left in Oldfield to meet the equality objectives although more related to Widcombe

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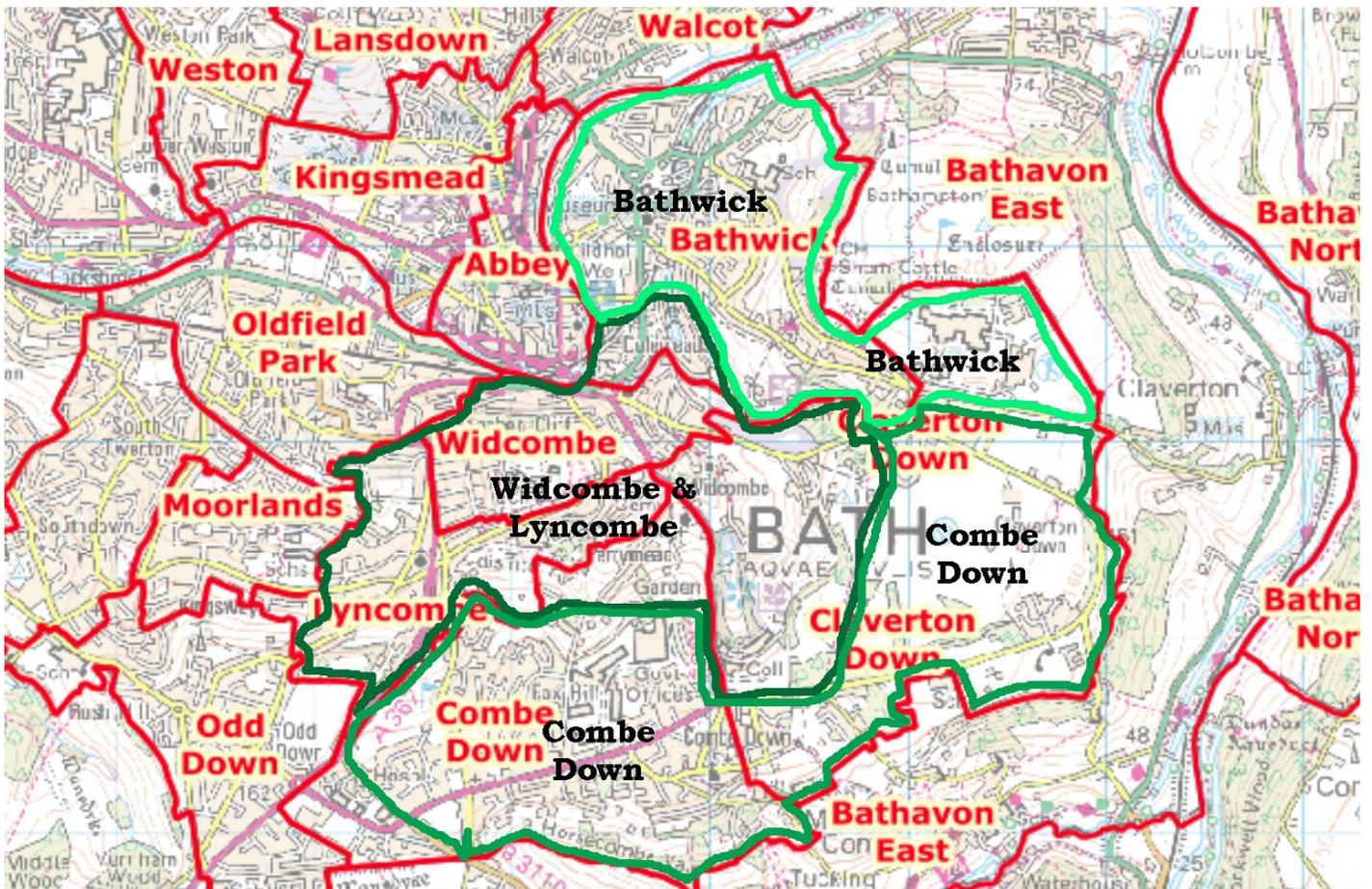
Proposed Area	Widcombe & Lyncombe	Bathwick	Combe Down	Claverton Down	Oldfield Park	Comments
Perrymead	141		-141			Return to Widcombe (cut off from Combe Down)
Combe Down (east) Tynning Road /Church Rd East/ North Rd East/Brow/ St Winifreds Drive/ The Rockery / Shaft Road			438	-438		Unite Combe Down
Claverton Down Flatwoods Road /Claverton Drive/ Claverton Down Road			157	-157		Return to Combe Down
Englishcombe Lane Englishcombe Way / Westfield close	-170					Move to Moorfiled
Small transfers to be identified to achieve electoral equality		-300	-400			Bathwick to elsewhere Combe Down to Odd Down (Near B3110)
Total Electors	5204	5182	5188	0	7075	
Councilors	2	2	2	0	3	
Elector per Councilor	2602	2599	2594	0	2358	

Notes:

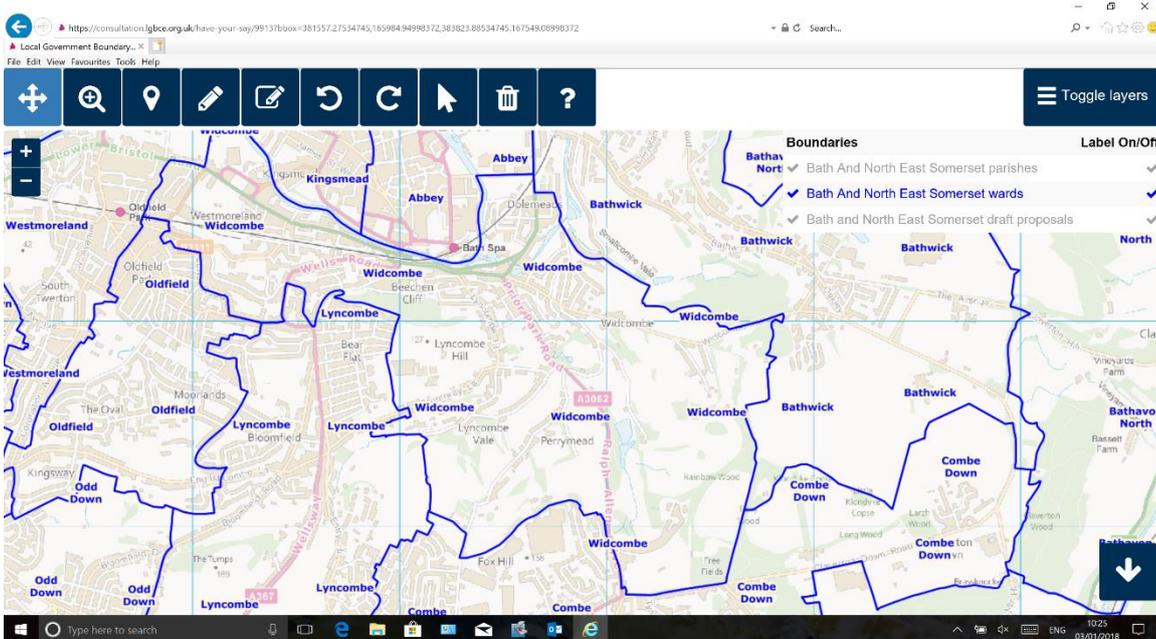
1. Changes are based on electoral register from 2017. Therefore are estimated.
2. Assumed growth in Claverton Ward is solely due to University.
3. Target is 2367 +/- 10% for each councillor (ie range of 2130 to 2604 electors).
4. Our proposals deliver the equality requirement within +/- 10% but reflect much better local communities and democratic accountability than do the Commission's draft recommendations.
5. Main changes are:
 - a. Claverton Down Ward is removed
 - b. Widcombe & Lyncombe are joined as one ward
 - c. University is returned to Bathwick
 - d. Claverton Rd North area is returned to Bathwick
 - e. Widcombe Hill is returned to Widcombe & Lyncombe reuniting Widcombe Hill
 - f. Widcombe Old Village is reunited with Widcombe areas
 - g. Lime Grove & Pultney / Dolemeads/ Pultney Road are returned to Widcombe & Lyncombe using the River, Railway and Canal as natural boundaries. Also unites Widcombe Schools within their main catchment areas of Widcombe.
 - h. East of Wellsway is returned to Widcombe using the A367 as the natural boundary these areas strongly linked with Widcombe & Lyncombe areas
 - i. Perrymead is returned to Widcombe & Lyncombe (it has no vehicle access to Combe Down). Residents are drawn to Widcombe & Lyncombe and unites Lyncombe Valley.
 - j. Combe Down East is returned to Combe Down to unite the village
 - k. Claverton Down South reunited with Combe Down

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WA recommended ward boundaries (resulting from applying changes above)

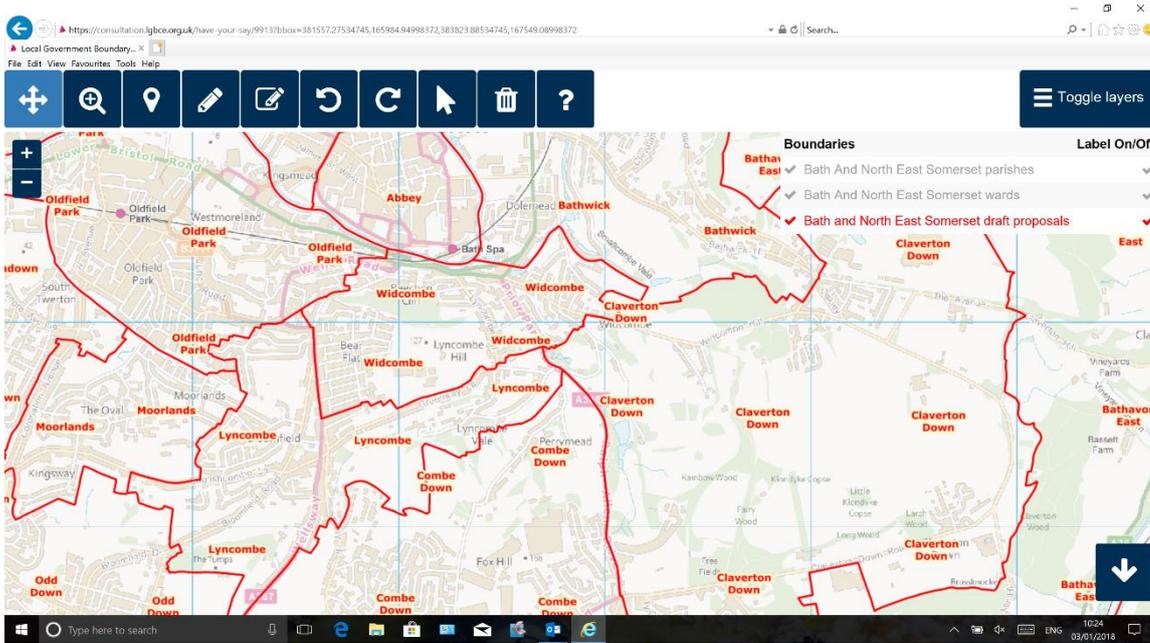


Extracts from the Commission's report (current and draft ward proposals)



Widcombe and surrounding wards - Existing

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Widcombe and surrounding wards – Commission's Draft Recommendations