

Conservative submission to LGBCE draft warding proposals for Bath & North East Somerset

Introduction:

Bath & North East Somerset Conservatives broadly welcome and support the Draft Recommendations put forward by the Commission, based upon a total of 59 Councillors, with a mix of 1, 2 and 3 Member wards.

Our submission therefore limits our comments to those areas where we believe improvements can be made to the Commission's draft proposals that would enable the warding arrangements to better satisfy the criteria of community ties as well as effective and convenient local governance whilst also satisfying, and in some cases improving upon, the requirement of electoral equality.

There are a small number of amendments which we would like to propose which are as follows:

Western and Southern Wards (North East Somerset)

In relation to the Commission's warding proposals for the North East Somerset part of the district, there are two instances where we feel some improvements can be made in order to better satisfy the criteria of electoral equality and effective and convenient governance, whilst improving or maintaining community identity.

Clutton, Farmborough and Timsbury:

We note that the Commission currently proposes the retention of Timsbury as a single-member ward covering a relatively small geographical area and with a significant variance from the average/target number of electors of -10%.

At the same time the Commission proposes to create an adjoining single-member ward of Clutton & Farmborough covering a large geographical area and with a variance of +8%.

We are concerned that the significant divergence from the average number of electors in these instances does not best serve the interests of electoral equality in these wards. In the instance of Timsbury, the resultant electorate of -10% represents the largest divergence from the average of any ward in the authority area, and is at the very outer limits of the tolerance permitted to achieve good electorate equality.

These proposals therefore result in a total variance in electorate of 18% between neighbouring communities. This also means that the single councillor in Clutton & Farmborough would not only be representing a significantly larger number of electors than their neighbouring councillor in Timsbury, but would also have a much more widely dispersed population to cover than the single councillor in Timsbury.

The population density for Timsbury is in the region of 442 electors per SqKm whilst that of the existing Farmborough ward, for example, is below 60 per SqKm. Therefore the geographical distances to cover in order to serve the electorate and support the Parish Councils will be far greater for the proposed Clutton & Farmborough ward than for Timsbury.

Whilst such differences in geography are unavoidable in many instances due to the need to equalise electorates whilst maintaining community identities, we do not feel such a

discrepancy is necessary in this case due to the close proximity of the Timsbury and Clutton & Farmborough wards, and the strong community ties between the villages in this southwestern part of the district.

Therefore, in the interests of significantly improved electoral equality and more effective and convenient local government, we propose that Timsbury should merge with the proposed Clutton & Farmborough ward to become part of a two-member ward.

The electorate of this ward would have a **variance of -1%** and the average size of area to cover per Councillor would be equalised.

As well as improving both electoral equality and effective local governance, the test of community ties would also be met by this proposal.

Timsbury has close connections with the proposed Clutton & Farmborough ward, with the B3115 and the Timsbury Road from Farmborough village linking the villages. Furthermore, Timsbury contains more local amenities than Clutton, Farmborough, Marksbury or Chelwood, meaning that for most residents in this area Timsbury is the nearest location for facilities such as a Post Office, doctors' surgery and pharmacy.

We would propose that the two-member ward (comprising the Parishes of Timsbury, Farmborough, Marksbury, Chelwood and Clutton) should be named either 'Clutton, Farmborough & Timsbury' or simply 'Clutton & Timsbury' as the two largest settlements in the proposed two-member ward.

Bathavon South:

We broadly support the Commission's proposal for a revised Bathavon South ward. However, we recognise that this will be a particularly large ward for a single councillor to represent, containing a total of eight Parishes over a dispersed geographical area.

In order to improve effective representation of this ward, we ask the Commission to consider moving the Parish of Priston from Bathavon South into a two-member Clutton, Farmborough & Timsbury ward (as set out above). This would make Bathavon South more manageable for the Councillor representing this ward and easier for them to work closely with their Parish Councils.

This change would mean that:

- Bathavon South would have 2317 electors (-2%)
- A two-member Clutton, Farmborough & Timsbury ward (with the inclusion of Priston) would then have 4906 electors (+4%)

Bath City South

We welcome many aspects of the Commission's warding proposals for the City of Bath. The proposals relating to Bathwick, Weston, Widcombe, Twerton, Southdown and Odd Down in particular reflect the strong community identities of these areas on very sensible boundaries.

The following comments and proposals therefore focus on areas where we feel improvements can be made to the warding arrangements in order to better recognise

community identity, whilst also satisfying or improving electoral equality, and have been significantly informed by feedback that we have received from residents.

Combe Down and Claverton Down:

We note the Commission's proposals to create a 2-member Combe Down ward (with an electorate +8% of target) and a 1-member Claverton Down ward (with an electorate of -4% of target).

To achieve satisfactory electoral equality between these wards, the Commission has proposed a boundary between these two wards that cuts through the middle of Combe Down village.

We are aware that there has been significant concern from the community and opposition to this proposal from the residents of Combe Down village.

Therefore, in order to maintain the long-standing community identity of Combe Down village, we propose that Combe Down and Claverton Down merge to become a 3-Member ward.

This straightforward merger would significantly improve community identity, whilst also slightly improving electoral equality. Whilst this would result in a relatively large ward, it would not be unusually so, and there are strong links between the Combe Down and Claverton communities, joined together by North Road/Claverton Down Road which loops round to the University of Bath campus and acts as a spine road though the whole area. Furthermore, much of the proposed Claverton Down ward has for many years sat comfortably within the current Combe Down ward.

We therefore feel that merging these proposed wards into a single 3-Member Combe Down & Claverton Down ward would – by keeping together the Combe Down village community - deliver much improved community identity, as well as good electoral equality (+6% of target). We propose that this ward be named either 'Combe Down & Claverton' or simply 'Combe Down'.

We propose very little change to the ward boundary suggested by the Commission for Combe Down – apart from a small number of roads on the border with the proposed Lyncombe ward at Entry Hill, and which are set out in more detail below.

Lyncombe:

We welcome the Commission's proposals for a single-member Lyncombe ward, which we feel takes good account of the natural community identity of this area, particularly the ties between the Bear Flat and Bloomfield communities, whilst sensibly bringing the whole of Greenway Lane, together with Lyncombe Vale, into the ward.

There is however a particular anomaly in the Commission's current proposals which we feel could easily be rectified to improve community identity and electoral equality.

The Commission proposes moving much of Entry Hill and the cul-de-sacs off it out of the existing Lyncombe ward and into Combe Down (namely Entry Hill Drive, Ivy Bank Park and Entry Hill Park). These roads, whilst proximate in geographical terms to Combe Down, have very few, if any, community ties with the Combe Down/Foxhill community.

Entry Hill Drive, Ivy Bank Park and Entry Hill Park are all cul-de-sacs which are 'back to

back' with Drake Avenue in Foxhill, but there are no physical links (in terms of roads or footpaths) between these roads and communities. Indeed there is an escarpment between the properties in Foxhill and those off Entry Hill creating a physical barrier between these premises.

Due to their connection to Entry Hill, residents of these roads are in fact naturally more tied to the Lyncombe/Bloomfield community.

Therefore, in order to maintain the community ties that exist between the residents of Entry Hill and the wider Lyncombe community, we propose that:

- The stretch of Entry Hill from Entry Hill Drive up to Entry Hill Park, together with Entry Hill Drive, Ivy Bank Park and Entry Hill Park, be retained within the Lyncombe ward and moved from the currently proposed Combe Down ward.

This would result in a move of approximately 270 electors from the proposed Combe Down ward into the proposed Lyncombe ward, resulting in the proposed Lyncombe ward becoming +6% of the average.

As a result, our proposed 3-member Combe Down & Claverton Down ward would be exactly on target.

Widcombe:

We welcome the Commission's proposal for a single-member Widcombe ward, which now creates a strong natural community centred around Alexandra Park, together with the historic Widcombe community around Widcombe Parade and the lower part of Widcombe Hill. This creates a strong community identity in this area, and addresses certain historic anomalies such as the presence of a large part of Oldfield Park within the Widcombe ward.

The small area known as 'The Poets' to the east of the Wellsway (which comprises the roads from Beechen Cliff Road to Devonshire Buildings, including Chaucer Road, Shakespeare Avenue, Kipling Ave, Milton Ave, Byron Road etc), is very different in character to the Bloomfield/Bear Flat community on the other side of the Wellsway. Whilst linked to the Wellsway by road, the community naturally connects with the proposed Widcombe ward through Alexandra Park, and so the Commission's proposals for this area within the Widcombe ward are sensible.

The Commission has asked for views on whether the proposed single-member Lyncombe and Widcombe wards should be merged to form one 2-member ward.

In our original submission we had proposed a joined Widcombe/Lyncombe ward on somewhat different boundaries. However, **having listened to feedback from residents and considered the Commission's proposal, we feel that the creation of two single-councillor wards in this instance recognises the distinct communities that exist in Lyncombe and Widcombe – and we therefore support the creation of two single-councillor wards.**

There are few, if any, meaningful ties between the Bloomfield and Widcombe communities (the former centred around Bloomfield Road and the latter around Widcombe Hill), and so bringing them together into one ward would make very little sense and as such has never been done in the past.

We would therefore support the Commission's proposal for a single-member Widcombe ward on the boundaries proposed.

Bath City North

Lansdown:

We have received a large number of representations from residents voicing their opposition to the proposed changes to Lansdown ward, which would result in the community being split in two, and a large portion of the well-established Lansdown community being moved into Kingsmead.

Lansdown is one of the longest-established residential communities in Bath, with historical records showing that the community of 'Lansdown' stretches all the way into quite central parts of the city such as the Circus and Assembly Rooms, linked together by Lansdown Road – which acts as a 'spine' running through and connecting the Lansdown community. What distinguishes these parts of the City from the 'city centre' is their (mainly Georgian and Victorian) residential nature, as opposed to the more commercially-dominated parts of Kingsmead and Abbey, where there are a greater proportion of businesses, retail units and flats.

Taking on board feedback from residents in the area, we feel that that the Commission's proposals would unnecessarily split a well-established community in two. This is illustrated by the fact a significant stretch of Lansdown Road, as well as roads such as Lansdown Grove, are proposed to be moved out of Lansdown and into Kingsmead ward.

On existing (current) ward boundaries, a 2-member Lansdown would be -14% of the target electorate. Under the Commission's proposals the single-member Lansdown ward would be -6% of average.

Therefore, in order to maintain the strong historic community identity of Lansdown whilst achieving acceptable electoral equality, we propose that the new Lansdown ward revert to boundaries more akin to the ward's existing footprint, but with a small extension to the south of the ward.

Specifically, we propose that the southern boundary be redrawn to the bottom of Cavendish Road, along the south side of Crescent Lane and along Rivers Street, joining the existing boundary at the east end of Julian Road, thereby incorporating the St James Square area into Lansdown where it is a more natural community fit. In total this adds around 650 electors to the current Lansdown ward and results in a 2-member ward of roughly 4,330 (-8% of average).

This would then create a strong natural community boundary at the southern end of the ward, and would address a current anomaly by bringing properties into the ward that have always been part of the historic Lansdown community.

Kingsmead:

Due to its geography and the presence of Royal Victoria Park, Kingsmead ward has always comprised a number of smaller neighbourhoods, and the ward itself has existed on varying boundaries over the years and in different incarnations under previous reviews.

As noted above, the revised Kingsmead ward proposed by the Commission would bring a large number of properties into Kingsmead from southern Lansdown. Centred around Lansdown Road, these areas have very few, if any, meaningful connection with the

remainder of Kingsmead, which is naturally more linked to the Upper Bristol Road and city centre.

Therefore, the changes proposed to Lansdown above would enable more of the existing and familiar Kingsmead ward boundary to remain intact, and create a more natural community with Royal Victoria Park at its heart and linked by the A4 Upper Bristol Road.

This would result in a single-member Kingsmead ward comprised of approximately 2,480 (+4% of average).

Abbey:

We welcome and support the Commission's proposals for Abbey ward, which follow the strong line of the River Avon and create a ward focussed on the central core of the city.

However, given our changes proposed above to Lansdown and Kingsmead, **in order to improve local representation and community ties, we suggest that the Commission merge the proposed single-member Abbey ward with our proposed single-member Kingsmead ward to create a two-member ward.**

There are many commonalities between the proposed Abbey and Kingsmead wards, particularly in terms of shared issues and concerns. There are no obvious or natural community boundaries between Abbey and Kingsmead, and the wards are connected by the numerous roads running east to west, including the A4.

Merging Abbey and Kingsmead into one ward would allow the common interests of residents in the central area of the City to be jointly represented. It would also bring Kingsmead Square back into the Kingsmead ward. **The resulting two-member ward would be approximately +6% of the target electorate.**

If the Commission were minded to merge Abbey and Kingsmead into a two-member ward, we suggest the ward be named Kingsmead.

Walcot and Larkhall:

We broadly welcome the Commission's proposals for Walcot and Larkhall.

However, we have received a number of representations from residents of the Fairfield Park and the St Saviour's Road area who are deeply unhappy about the proposed transfer of this community from the current Lambridge ward into Walcot.

Given the strength of local feeling about this change, we therefore ask that the Commission give consideration to reversing their proposals concerning these two areas, transferring them back into the proposed Larkhall ward – thereby maintaining their strong existing community ties. This would then create a two-member Larkhall ward more akin to the current Lambridge ward, and single-member Walcot ward focussed more upon the community on and around the London Road and Snow Hill area. The inclusion of the Grosvenor and Ringwell area into Larkhall/Lambridge would offset the loss of electors from the ward resulting from the establishment of the A46 as the new boundary as proposed by the Commission. If this change were to take place, the Commission may feel it makes sense for the name of this ward to revert to its existing name of Lambridge.

Summary

The above represents the Conservative submission to the LGBCE consultation on the draft arrangements for Bath & North East Somerset.

For ease of reference, below is a summary of our proposed changes to the Commission's draft warding proposals:

1. To improve electoral equality whilst recognising strong community ties, we propose the merger of Timsbury with Clutton & Farmborough to create a 2-member ward.
2. To improve representation and governance, we ask that the Commission consider moving the parish of Priston from Bathavon South into our proposed Clutton, Farmbough & Timsbury ward (referenced above).
3. To maintain and strengthen community identity, we propose the merger of Combe Down with Claverton Down to become a 3-member ward, recognising the existing ties between these communities and enabling Combe Down village to be kept within one ward.
4. To maintain existing community ties, we propose a small number of roads off Entry Hill be moved back into the proposed Lyncombe ward from the proposed Combe Down ward.
5. To recognise the distinct community identities of Lyncombe and Widcombe, we support the Commission's proposal for two single-member wards here.
6. To maintain the strong and long-standing community identity of Lansdown, we propose that Lansdown revert to its existing boundaries as a two-member ward, but with the addition of the St James Square area to enable good electoral equality.
7. To improve community identity, we ask that the Commission consider merging the proposed Abbey ward with our revised Kingsmead ward to create a two-member Kingsmead ward.
8. To maintain existing community ties, we ask that the Commission consider retaining the Fairfield Park area within the proposed Larkhall ward, thereby creating a single-member Walcot ward and a two-member Larkhall (or Lambridge) ward.

Submitted by Cllr Paul Myers, Chair of Bath & North East Somerset Conservative Council Group, on behalf of Bath and North East Somerset Conservatives.