

# Council report



Report of Chief Executive

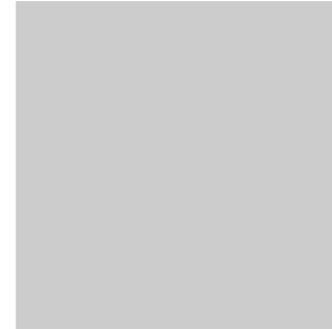
Author: David Buckle

Telephone: 01235 540303

E-mail: david.buckle@southandvale.gov.uk

To: Council

DATE: 29 August 2012



## Vale of White Horse District – New Warding Arrangements

### Recommendation

That Council agrees the submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England attached as Appendix A to this report

### Purpose of Report

1. This report invites Council to agree a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) for England on warding arrangements as it reduces in size from 51 to 38 members.

### Background

2. In March of this year the LGBCE commenced an electoral review at our request. In June it announced that it was minded to recommend (ultimately, parliament takes the decision) a council size of 38. This was the number that Council agreed to propose at its meeting in February.
3. The next stage of the review is to develop warding proposals. At this time the LGBCE has published nothing so we have a blank canvass on which to make proposals. However, the number of councillors we put forward must add up to 38 (or conceivably 37 or 39 if there are particular reasons justifying such a variation) and best comply with the three criteria that govern electoral reviews, all of which carry equal weight. These are:
  - to deliver electoral equality for voters
  - to provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
  - to provide effective and convenient local government
4. In November the LGBCE will publish its draft warding proposals and council will have an opportunity to decide its formal response to these at a meeting next January. The benefit of making a submission now though is that it will hopefully influence the LGBCE to publish draft proposals that accord with our wishes.

5. Appendix A sets out the submission that I am inviting council to agree for onward submission to the LGBCE. I have not attached maps because of the difficulties that may arise in trying to open and peruse them. Rather all of the maps have been placed on the council's website. There is also a comprehensive set of large scale maps in the council chamber foyer in Abbey House, which will be moved to the Guildhall in readiness for the meeting.
6. The LGBCE will want to know the level of support for particular proposals and whether counter views were based on party politics or local factors. The debate at council will, therefore, be structured to enable this to happen.

### **Financial Implications**

7. There are no financial implications arising from this report

### **Legal Implications**

8. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **Conclusion**

7. Council is invited to agree that I send the submission attached at Appendix A to the LGBCE.

### **Background papers**

There are no background papers. The LGBCE's website provides comprehensive details of the review to date – [www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/oxfordshire/vale-of-white-horse-fer](http://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/south-east/oxfordshire/vale-of-white-horse-fer).

### Vale of White Horse

#### Warding Proposals

##### Introduction

1. The Council has previously submitted a proposal to the Commission for a council size of 38, which the Commission has indicated it is minded to agree. Our attention has now turned to the warding arrangements that would result from having 38 councillors representing the district of Vale of White Horse.
2. Our projected electorate for the whole district in 2018 (the date for which we were asked to make projections) is 98,812, which is consistent with the recently published 2011 census data. It takes account of expected new developments, in line with the council's emerging core strategy, and discussions with house builders about build rates. To date, the Commission has not raised any issues regarding the projected figure. 98,812 divided by 38 gives an average electorate per councillor of 2600.
3. In developing our proposal we have taken full account of the three statutory criteria that the Commission must consider when devising new warding arrangements;
  - to deliver electoral equality for voters
  - to provide boundaries that reflect natural communities
  - to provide effective and convenient local government

##### Development of the council's proposed warding arrangements

4. The council's proposal was developed by the officer team led by the chief executive and an all party councillor working group before being presented to the full council for approval. It has unanimous support, other than in those areas indicated in the accompanying letter. We think that the Commission should give significant weight to the level of consensus that we have achieved around these proposals.
5. In addition to the statutory criteria, the working group also applied a number of subsidiary criteria, as follows:
  - a presumption in favour of single member wards unless local circumstances dictate otherwise. The working group had a clear view that single member wards aid accountability and provide clarity for electors.
  - to keep urban parishes (Abingdon-on-Thames, Faringdon, Wantage and Grove) separate from the surrounding rural parishes unless local circumstances dictated otherwise. The original proposal for 38 councillors was, in part, decided upon to facilitate this
  - to use whole parishes as building blocks wherever possible

## Warding proposals

6. The table below sets out in summary form the council's warding proposals. These are also shown on the accompanying maps. There is a brief commentary on the rationale for each proposal. The electorates quoted are based on our projections by parish. Where we have created wards within parishes the electorates are approximate. We would look to work with the Commission to define precise boundaries (and electorates) if it is minded to accept the principle behind each proposal.
7. In each case we have proposed a name for the new ward. We have adopted a pragmatic approach, using the names of larger settlements to define wards – usually one but occasionally two where we consider that this is helpful. In two cases we have proposed generic names because there are no dominant settlements. Within the more urban wards we have proposed names that we think best define those parts of the town covered by the ward.

Ward Name	Number of Cllrs	Projected electorate 2018	% variance from average
Abingdon Barton	1	2530	-2.7
Abingdon Caldecott North	1	2610	+0.4
Abingdon Caldecott South	1	2690	+3.5
Abingdon Dunmore	1	2430	-6.5
Abingdon Fitzharris	1	2540	-2.3
Abingdon Northcourt	1	2450	-5.8
Abingdon Ock	1	2770	+6.5
Abingdon Peachcroft North	1	2600	0
Abingdon Peachcroft South	1	2500	-3.8
Abingdon Wildmoor	1	2580	-0.8
Faringdon	2	5860	+12.7
Grove North	2	5470	+5.2
Wantage and Grove Brook	2	5390	+3.7
Wantage Charlton	2	5430	+4.4
Blewbury	1	2930	+12.7
Botley	1	2610	+0.4
Cumnor North	1	2640	+1.5
Cumnor South	1	2560	-1.5
Drayton	1	2370	-8.8
Harwell	1	2280	-12.3
Hendreds	1	2540	-2.3
Kennington and Radley	2	5380	+3.3
Kingston Bagpuize	1	2480	-4.6
Marcham	1	2430	-6.5
Ridgeway	1	2360	-9.2
Shrivenham	1	2520	-3.1
Stanford	1	2710	+4.2
Steventon and the Hanneys	1	2430	-6.5
Sunningwell and the Hinkseys	1	2420	-6.9
Sutton Courteney	1	2480	-4.6
Thames	1	2590	-0.4
Watchfield	1	2510	-3.5
Wootton	1	2710	+4.2

## **Abingdon-on-Thames**

8. We consider that 10 single member wards in Abingdon-on-Thames best meets the statutory criteria. We have achieved good electoral equality and as there is no significant new housing proposed for the town we consider that there is little risk of inequality arising in the foreseeable future. In the main we have used natural boundaries to define wards. We think that single member wards in the town will deliver effective and convenient local government, particularly for electors who will have absolute clarity over which local councillor is representing their interests.
9. In the case of Abingdon-on-Thames we do not describe each ward in detail as we think the map accompanying this submission provides the clearest picture. Suffice to say that electoral equality ranges from +6.5 to -6.5 per cent.

## **Faringdon**

10. This is a proposed two member ward covering the whole of the town and parish of Faringdon. Although the electorate per councillor is higher than the average at 2930, we consider that Faringdon is a natural community in its own right. To remove part of the town and place it in another ward to achieve electoral equality, would represent a wholly artificial construct that the local electorate would not recognise. Further, we do not consider that there is any merit in an artificial sub-division of the town into two wards, as it tends to see itself as a single entity.
11. The creation of a two member ward also offsets any risk of electoral imbalance if new housing developments do not come on stream at their expected pace.

## **Wantage and Grove preamble**

12. We propose three two member wards for Wantage and Grove. Of necessity to achieve electoral equality one of these wards extends into both parishes. Wantage and Grove is subject to significant planned housing growth over the next decade and we consider that two member wards mitigate against the risk of electoral inequality occurring in the short to medium term.

## **Grove North**

13. This proposed two member ward comprises the northern and western parts of Grove parish. The boundaries with the proposed Wantage and Grove Brook ward are largely defined by the line of the old Berks and Wilts canal, Letcombe Brook and Pill Ditch. This electorate in this ward is scheduled to increase markedly by 2018 as a major development at Grove Airfield is built out.

## **Wantage and Grove Brook**

14. This ward comprises the south-east part of Grove parish with north-west part of Wantage parish. The part of Wantage parish included in the ward largely aligns with the existing Wantage Segsbury ward. Within Wantage the boundary between this ward and the proposed Wantage Charlton ward is well defined by Letcombe Brook and Grove Road. The boundary in Grove is as described above.
15. Letcombe Brook is a constant feature, part defining the southern and western boundaries as well as running through the centre of the ward, hence the proposed ward name.

## **Wantage Charlton**

16. This ward comprises the bulk of Wantage parish, including the town centre. It largely comprises the same area as the existing Wantage Charlton ward, hence the proposed name. The boundary with Wantage and Grove Brook is well defined as described above.

## **Blewbury**

17. This ward comprises three parishes in the south-eastern corner of the district. By necessity these three parishes need to link together. The electorate is quite high but the alternative would be to sub-divide Chilton parish along the line of the A34. We do not favour this because the village lies to one side of the road and the school and new housing to the other and we would be sub-dividing a natural community if we did so.

## **Botley**

18. This ward comprises the most populous part of North Hinksey parish together with the much smaller Wytham parish. The area in North Hinksey parish is commonly known as Botley, hence the proposed ward name. The only road link from Wytham within the district is into North Hinksey parish. The boundary with the proposed Sunningwell and the Hinkseys ward is a strong one – the old village and other development to the east of the A34, Harcourt Hill including the Westminster College campus of Oxford Brookes University, and the site of a proposed new development off Lime Road.

## **Cumnor North**

19. This ward comprises the northern part of Cumnor parish taking the Dean Court area as well as the village of Farmoor

## **Cumnor South**

20. This ward comprises the southern part of Cumnor parish including the village of Cumnor as well as the Cumnor Hill area east of Botley.

## **Drayton**

21. This ward comprises the whole of Drayton parish with that part of Milton parish that includes Milton Village. Milton parish is already divided in this manner under the current electoral arrangements. The communities of Milton village and Milton Heights are separated by a business park, railway and the A34. They are distinct from each other.

## **Harwell**

22. This ward comprises part of Harwell parish. It has the smallest electorate of any proposed ward, reflecting the fact that it will grow rapidly over time as future housing schemes come to fruition. The part of the parish excluded from this ward (and included in the proposal for Hendreds) is distant from the main village and forms part of the Harwell Oxford campus, much of which is in East Hendred parish.

## **Hendreds**

23. This ward comprises four parishes (including East and West Hendred) that contain villages sitting at the foot of the North Wessex Downs. It also includes that part of Harwell parish on the Harwell Oxford campus that is scheduled for new housing. Much of the Harwell Oxford campus already sits in East Hendred parish so this represents a logical proposal that will combine an area of housing growth with an area of significant employment growth.

## **Kennington and Radley**

24. This is a two member ward covering the parishes of Kennington and Radley. We have deviated from our preference for single member wards in this instance because we think a two member ward better reflects natural communities. To achieve electoral equality, a single member ward covering Radley parish would also have to include a small part of the southern end of Kennington village, thereby putting an artificial division into a natural community. We do not favour this.

## **Kingston Bagpuize**

25. This ward comprises the parish of Kingston Bagpuize with a string of five smaller parishes to the south and east. Although you have to travel out of ward for a short distance when going from Frilford to Kingston Bagpuize, the two communities are well connected along a busy main road.

## **Marcham**

26. This ward comprises the parish of Marcham together with the southern part of the parish of St Helens Without (taking in the village of Shippon and the Abingdon military station). There are good road links between the various communities.

## **Ridgeway**

27. This ward comprises a collection of seven parishes to the west of Wantage and Grove. There is no dominant settlement hence the proposed ward name, which reflects the fact that the ancient Ridgeway path passes through five of the seven parishes.

## **Shrivenham**

28. This ward comprises the parish of Shrivenham and three smaller parishes that lie to its south, all of which are well connected with each other.

## **Stanford**

29. This ward comprises six parishes, of which Stanford-in-the-Vale is the largest by some margin, hence the proposed name. There are good road connections between the main villages.

## **Steventon and the Hanneys**

30. This is a collection of four parishes forming a well-connected ribbon of villages north and east of Grove. The proposed name reflects the fact that there is no single largest settlement and helps to define what is a somewhat linear ward.

### **Sunningwell and the Hinkseys**

31. This ward comprises the parishes of Sunningwell and South Hinksey together with that part of North Hinksey parish that falls outside of the proposed Botley ward – see Botley for a description of the proposed boundary. This is another linear ward where we propose to use two names to help define its area.

### **Sutton Courtenay**

32. This ward comprises two parishes in the east of the district that and mirrors a ward already in existence.

### **Thames**

33. This ward comprises a linear group of eight parishes running along the A420 in the north of the district. Virtually all of the electorate lives in villages between this road and the Thames, which defines the northern boundary and provides the proposed name. Although elongated there is good communication along the A420, which makes this ward a viable proposition in respect of effective and convenient local government.

### **Watchfield**

34. This ward comprises the parish of Watchfield, together with seven smaller parishes in the north-west corner of the district. It is a large ward geographically, reflecting the sparse population in the area outside of Watchfield village, but it delivers electoral equality whilst taking account of natural community, as all the constituent villages border on/are close to Swindon in the west.

### **Wootton**

35. This ward comprises Wootton parish with the northern part of St Helens Without parish that contains the village of Dry Sandford. This combination reflects the natural community and achieves electoral equality.