Introduction

In this submission, I make proposals as a resident of Thatcham for the warding arrangements for the community of Thatcham; this comprises the town of Thatcham, the surrounding rural areas that fall within the parish of Thatcham and a few places where the natural settlement boundary has extended beyond the parish boundary.

I support the submission made by Newbury and West Berkshire Liberal Democrats, and the proposals in my submission are aligned with that submission apart from one detail\(^1\). In this submission, I explain the rationale for my support of these proposals, and provide some additional information and analysis.

The number of registered voters in Thatcham corresponds to either six or seven councillors out of forty two. I urge the Boundary Commission to opt for seven, because this enables the warding arrangement to reflect the communities within Thatcham. I was not able to find a warding pattern for six councillors that did not either divide communities, or ‘lump’ together communities with nothing in common, or both. This should comprise three wards with two councillors and one with a single councillor:

- Thatcham West (two councillors)
- Thatcham North (two councillors)
- Thatcham Central (one councillor)
- Thatcham South and Crookham (two councillors)

A ward with three councillors would be too large, and would ‘lump’ together communities with nothing in common.

The proposals in this submission (and therefore also the proposal made by Newbury and West Berkshire Liberal Democrats) would enable all wards to be within 10% of the target number of voters, calculated using January 2016 figures for voter registration, and extrapolated to WBC projections for 2022 (see section 4).

The current polling districts for Thatcham are arbitrary divisions of wards, to provide convenient numbers of voters for polling stations. Many of these polling districts do not represent communities, and they are therefore a poor building block for constructing a new warding arrangement. The analysis in this submission has therefore been developed using a GIS software tool, with data on the addresses of the voters in the electoral register as of January 2017. This cannot make use of the predictions made by West Berkshire Council for 2022, because there is no information on how these changes might be distributed across a polling district. However, there are serious questions about the reliability of this data, as discussed in the following section.

\(^1\) Henwick Court Cottages; see section 4.1
2 Electoral Figures

The Boundary Commission has made available data on voter numbers provided by West Berkshire Council as part of this consultation. However, this data contains numerous inconsistencies and anomalies, as described in the following sections.

The Boundary Commission should therefore not base its analysis on the figures provided so far by West Berkshire Council.

2.1 Inconsistency in predicted number of voters

In the documentation for the Extraordinary Meeting of West Berkshire Council on Tuesday 22nd November 2016, it is stated that "The forecast of the number of people eligible to vote by 2022 shows a cumulative projected increase of 3.2% on the 2016 figures to 125,877." The corresponding number in the Excel spreadsheet is the total of the column for "what is the predicted electorate?" - i.e. the total of cells I20 to I134 on the sheet 'Electoral data'. This total is 124,492.

The Boundary Commission needs to investigate why these two figures provided by WBC differ by around 1400, which is around 20% of the predicted increase in eligible voters.

2.2 Unexplained reduction in number of voters

In the Excel Spreadsheet of electoral figures, there is an inexplicable reduction in the predicted number of voters for some polling districts between 2016 and 2022. It is impossible to see any pattern or logic to this, because it is offset for many polling districts by planned housing developments.

In West Thatcham, polling districts TH2 and TH3 have quite similar demographics, yet TH2 is predicted to have no significant change in the number of voters, whereas TH3 is predicted to have a reduction of 10%.

Across the district, the greatest reduction in predicted number of voters is for Catmore, with a reduction of more than -35% (from 22 to 14), closely followed by Combe with a reduction of -25% (from 33 to 25). However, other comparable sparsely populated polling districts have increases - for example +16% for Shefford Woodlands (from 89 to 103) and +11% for Wasing (from 32 to 36). These wide variations suggest that population-wide demographic data is being applied inappropriately to small sample sizes.

There are several larger polling districts where the number of voters is predicted by WBC to fall substantially:
- Newbury No13 (Falkland): -17% (from 2470 to 2141)
- Newbury No14 (Falkland): -17% (from 2493 to 2071)
- Hungerford No2: -15% (from 200 to 169)
- Midgham: -14% (from 257 to 222)
- Tilehurst No3 (Birch Copse): -13% (from 1337 to 1162)
- Sulhampstead No1: -12% (from 254 to 224)
- Kintbury: -8% (from 694 to 636)
- Lambourn No1: -8% (from 227 to 208)
- Newbury No1 (Clay Hill): -7% (from 2736 to 2537)
- Thatcham No9 (Thatcham North): -7% (from 2144 to 2020)
- Tilehurst No7 (Birch Copse): -7% (from 1219 to 1139)
- Newbury No12 (St Johns): -6% (from 3380 to 3177)

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2 Section 6.2, page 22/36 of the pdf file. This is available at: https://www.lgbce.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/31970/WestBerkshireCouncilSizeSubmission-2016-11-22_Redacted.pdf

3 https://www.lgbce.org.uk/__data/assets/excel_doc/0004/31954/WestBerkshire_Prelim_ElectoralProforma_2016-12-08-FINAL.xls
- Thatcham No7 (Thatcham North): -5% (from 667 to 632)

However, Government documentation\(^4\) projects that the average household size will only reduce by only 1.5% over the period from 2016 to 2022\(^5\). It is very unlikely that the population of these polling districts will drop significantly, and I do not believe that these reductions could be justified by reductions in voter registration.

The Boundary Commission needs to investigate the methodology used by WBC to produce these numbers, and especially whether the massive reduction in numbers for some polling districts is justified.

### 2.3 Inconsistency with expected development

In March 2017, a planning inspector granted an appeal for 400 homes to be built in Speen ward\(^6\), which are likely to be built by 2022. A key reason why this appeal was granted was that the Council could no longer demonstrate its five year land supply from December 2016. As the WBC predictions for 2022 were presumably based on this land supply, they can no longer be relied upon.

In my own polling district of TH1, there is predicted to be a reduction of around a hundred, or 5% in the number of voters between 2016 and 2022. However, in my street alone (Henwick Lane) around fifty new dwellings will be completed and occupied during 2017, in two developments. Other developments are in the pipeline.

This problem appears to be widespread in estimates for other polling districts - the WBC predictions do not appear to take account of likely developments outside of its development plan, through infill, demolition and rebuilding at higher density, or conversion of commercial premises to flats.

### 3 Approach to developing the warding pattern

The approach to developing the warding pattern described below aims avoid breaking up communities or 'lumping' communities together that have nothing in common. However, this is not always possible while keeping the number of voters per ward roughly equal. Where it is necessary to break communities or lump communities together, it is preferable to do this in places where there is less cohesion.

The A4 is a natural boundary between communities, especially to the east of the town centre (the A4 is named Benham Hill, Bath Road, Chapel Street and London Road along different parts). It is not possible to create a sensible warding pattern for Thatcham without at least one of the wards spanning the A4. This proposal chooses to do this for Thatcham West, where the current ward is divided roughly equally by the A4, and where there is housing on both sides of the road.

Ward boundaries should not run along the centre of a residential road (as is currently the case for Northfield Road), as this is almost guaranteed to break up a community.

The majority of Thatcham is urban in terms of number of voters, but it has a large rural area to the south and East. This includes the community of Crookham, a reasonable number of houses surrounding Greenham Common (along Bury's Bank Road and Thornford Road) and individual houses dispersed across the rest of the area. these areas have less affinity with the urban parts of Thatcham than any community within urban Thatcham has with its neighbours. Currently, the parts of this area that are south of the River Kennet are in Thatcham South and Crookham ward, and the parts to the north are in Thatcham North ward.

\(^5\) Table 1 shows a reduction from 2.35 to 2.29 over the period from 2014 to 2024. This figure for the six years from 2016 to 2022 is 60% of the reduction for the ten year period.
4 Proposed warding arrangement for Thatcham

It is proposed that Thatcham should comprise four wards, three with two councillors and one with one councillor - as described in the following sections (the submission by Newbury and West Berkshire Liberal Democrats contains maps illustrating this proposed warding arrangement).

The table below gives the number of voters in each ward, based on electoral registrations up to January 2017. Two options are presented, one with the rural area to the north east of Thatcham Parish included in Thatcham North ward, and the second with it include in Thatcham South and Crookham ward. The first of these keeps a more regular shape to the wards boundaries, and achieves a better connection of the communities. The second keeps the number of voters per councillor within 10% of target. The first option is preferred, unless maintaining equal numbers of voters per councillor is paramount to the Boundary Commission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed new ward</th>
<th>Number of councillors</th>
<th>Rural north east part of Thatcham Parish included in Thatcham North</th>
<th>Rural north east part of Thatcham Parish included in Thatcham South &amp; Crookham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thatcham West</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5523 (95.9%)</td>
<td>5523 (95.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatcham North</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5754 (99.8%)</td>
<td>5706 (99.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatcham Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3027 (105.1%)</td>
<td>3027 (105.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thatcham South and Crookham</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5171 (89.7%)</td>
<td>5220 (90.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: the percentage is relative to the target of 2880 voters per councillor (1/42 of the electorate at end January 2017)

The methodology used for developing this submission does not allow a direct calculation of the voter numbers for 2022 based on WBC predictions. However, the percentages for 2022 would be very similar, based on an empirical assessment of how the changes in the WBC predictions are distributed across current Thatcham polling districts.

NOTE: The names of these wards are descriptive, and are not proposals for the formal titles of the new wards.

4.1 Thatcham West - two councillors

This ward is similar to the current Thatcham West ward, but extending further to the east.

South of the A4, the ward should include the whole length of Lower Way and Glebelands, the whole of St Johns Road, and the houses on the A4 as far east as the eastern junction with St Johns Road.

North of the A4, the eastern boundary should be to the East of Northfield Road, so that both sides of this road are in this ward. The houses along the A4 should also be in this ward, to the same point as the boundary to the south side.

Florence Gardens and the north side of Bowling Green road (the part to the south of Florence Gardens) should also be transferred to this ward from Cold Ash ward, because they are strongly connected to Thatcham.

The two dwellings of Henwick Court Cottages (at the very West of Thatcham Parish) are nearly 1km from any other dwelling in Thatcham, but they are immediately adjacent to the eastern edge of Manor Park in Clay Hill ward. It might be appropriate to move these two dwellings into the new Clay Hill ward.
4.2 Thatcham North - two councillors

This ward includes almost all of the current Thatcham North ward, plus the parts of the current Thatcham Central ward to the north of the A4.

The western boundary of this ward is to the east of Northfield Road, so that both sides of this road are in Thatcham West.

The southern boundary is the A4.

To the north, Billington Way, Maynard Close and Grindle Close should be transferred to this ward from Cold Ash ward. The access to these roads is from Heath Lane (the relief road) so they look to Thatcham.

The boundary to the east should extend at least as far as Floral Way, plus The Spinney and Farmhouse Mews (the development adjacent to the roundabout between Floral Way and Harts Hill Road).

Preferably, the rural dwellings to the north and East of Floral Way within Thatcham parish should also be included in this ward. If the Boundary Commission believes that it is critical to keep ward sizes within 10% of target, they could alternatively be included in the proposed Thatcham South ward.

4.3 Thatcham Central - one councillor

This ward comprises the town centre of Thatcham and the Moors estate.

The town centre includes The Broadway, the High Street and the roads around St Mary's church - Church gate, Church Lane, Green Lane and the closes off them.

The northern boundary is the A4.

The Moors estate comprises the Moors, Ilkley Way and all of the roads leading off them.

NOTE: The road connecting Braemar Close with Urquart Road (in Thatcham South ward) is gated; there is little sense of community between these two areas.

4.4 Thatcham South and Crookham - two councillors

This ward is basically the same as the current ward of Thatcham South and Crookham.

This ward is smaller than the other three Thatcham wards, in terms of voters per councillor - just less than 90% of the target. If this is critical to the Boundary Commission, the number of voters can be increased slightly by:

- Including the dwellings on the south side of Chapel Street between The Moors and The Broadway in this ward, instead of Thatcham Central.

- Including the rural dwellings to the north and East of Floral Way in this ward, instead of Thatcham North (see section 4.3)

Any further extension of the boundaries of this ward would inevitably cut across communities.