

Response to LGBCE Consultation on proposed warding patterns by North Herts Council

1. North Herts Council welcome the opportunity to respond to the LGBCE consultation on the proposed warding patterns.
2. The Council is broadly satisfied that the proposed warding patterns achieve the difficult balance between the statutory criteria – to ensure electoral equality, to deliver effective and convenient local governance, and to represent the interests and identities of local communities. On the whole, where the LGBCE have proposed warding arrangements that differ from those the Council submitted in the previous rounds of consultation, the Council is satisfied that these are appropriate and effective.
3. The Council supports the proposal that North Hertfordshire should be represented by 51 Councillors.
4. In addition, the Council supports the proposed warding arrangements for the following wards:
 - a. The renaming of Baldock Town to Baldock West.
 - b. The warding proposals for Royston, which maintain the majority of the existing boundaries within the town and keep the recognised existing wards, whilst recognising the ongoing growth in the local population.
 - c. The warding proposals for Hitchin, which maintain the majority of the existing boundaries within the town and keep the recognised existing wards.
 - d. The warding proposals for Ermine.
 - e. The warding proposals for Codicote & Kimpton.
 - f. The warding proposals for Langley, Preston & Walden. However, the Council objects to the proposed ward name and instead proposes the ward name *Hitchwood*, which is the former name for this area and is a more accurate representation of the different communities in the proposed ward (noting there is no village of Walden).
 - g. The warding proposals for Knebworth.
 - h. The warding proposals for Offley & Pirton. However, the Council objects to the proposed ward name, and instead proposed the ward name *Offa*, which is the former ward name for this area.
 - i. The warding proposals for Cadwell.
5. The Council broadly supports the proposed warding arrangements for Letchworth, provides the best option for both recognising the distinct communities of Letchworth and achieving good electoral balance. The railway line is a firm boundary between the north and south of Letchworth and it is entirely appropriate to use it as a basis for boundary divisions across the town. This also provides a more natural division than the current arrangements in Letchworth East - which crosses the tracks - which we support. The Commission proposals retain all existing communities without any inappropriate division, both north and south of the railway. They not only respect the main established communities of Wilbury, the Grange, Westbury, Jackmans and Old Pixmore (the area to the east of Norton Way South), but also the smaller communities within the Garden City, such as Norton village, the area around Nevells Road between the Common and the Railway, the small estate between Wilbury Road and the Pix Brook, (Longmead, Haymoor, Hawthorn Hill and Wheat Hill), and Willian Village.

However, the Council proposes that the 12 electors living in the area north of Wilbury Road between the Pix Brook and Stotfold Road be transferred from the Grange to Wilbury, as such links as they have are with Wilbury rather than the Grange.

6. Whilst the Council feels that the separation of developments GA1 and GA2 from Great Ashby does not lend itself to strong community identities, and it would be preferable to include them both within the same new ward, we recognise that due to the warding patterns elsewhere in the District this would result in unacceptable electoral variance elsewhere. Therefore, the Council reluctantly supports the proposed warding arrangements for Great Ashby and, by extension, the proposed arrangements for Wymondley, Graveley & St Ippolyts.
7. **However**, the Council **strongly objects** to the LGBCE's proposals regarding Baldock and the proposed Ashwell & Weston ward.
 - a. The developments outside of Baldock are an extension of the urban area and will be strikingly different in character and demographic from the very rural areas of Bygrave. The Council considers that there is no way that the development to the east of Baldock could be considered similar in nature or outlook to the rest of Bygrave. The issues residents will face will be different, and the community interests and identities will look to Baldock, not the rural areas of the parish of Bygrave. Bygrave currently has around 200 electors; the new development will contain around 1,400 electors by 2028 – vastly outnumbering the rest of Bygrave parish.
 - b. The proposed large ward would lead to a failure in representation of urban residents, who would be separated from their community in Baldock. It would also fail rural residents as the population of the new ward would be concentrated in the new developments of Baldock, in areas of Bygrave & Clothall parishes. As a result, the ward will be dominated by residents who will identify as being from Baldock and are serviced by Baldock's schools, shops, pubs and transport links.
 - c. The proposed Ashwell & Weston ward is too large to be effective and convenient, with 11 separate parish areas to represent. There is, as the LGBCE note, a single road that crosses the busy A505 dual carriageway – a junction with no lighting in which a narrow minor road crosses four lanes of traffic and a central reservation. Given the necessity for district Councillors to attend parish councils, meetings and events, many of which take place in the evenings, the proposed warding would require Councillors to potentially travel the length and breadth of a large rural ward on multiple occasions each week.
 - d. Current Councillors report that their wards, with up to 7 parish areas, can already be hard work to manage and consider that increasing this to 11 would be unviable and lead to worse representation for local communities.
 - e. In addition, a similar arrangement was put in place some years ago near Great Ashby, in which the new urban development was included with rural communities. That arrangement was ineffective and was resolved by creating a separate parish of Great Ashby. The Council suggests that, given it was ineffective then, it is unlikely to be a satisfactory resolution now.

- f. The LGBCE also says that the alternative proposed by the Council is not feasible since it would involve the creation of parish wards that would have an insufficient electorate in 2024. In fact, this is not the case. The population of the potential “Baldock Ward” of Bygrave Parish is currently 16% of the total population of Bygrave parish would allow a Parish Council of five to have four members from a Bygrave Ward and one from a Baldock Ward. It is the Council’s view that the challenge of having small parish wards should be navigated, not accommodated, and the goal of achieving good governance in parishes should not diminish good governance at district level.
- g. As acknowledged in the LGBCE’s proposals, the cross-party consensus represented in the North Herts Council’s initial proposal reflected this reality and we would encourage persistence in seeking arrangements that support this.
- h. Creation of a ward in Clothall Parish would not be necessary since there is no Parish Council in Clothall.
- i. The proposed arrangements are much less satisfactory from a community representation point of view and no better from the perspective of electoral equality. Therefore, the Council considers that the approach proposed previously by the council should be adopted rather than that recommended by the Commission.
- j. The Council also propose that, should the LGBCE revert to current warding arrangements in this area, the ward should retain the name *Arbury*, rather than be named after any specific villages.