

For Discussion Suggested Boundary changes

When circulating my report for this meeting I asked if members could come to the meeting with their suggestions.

Councillor Sharpe has put forward these proposals for consideration by full council, 24 June 2015.

Watford Borough Council – Local Government Boundary Commission Review

Background

This review has been made necessary by the number of wards having a greater than 10% variance from the mean ratio of electors to councillors. Wards in this category either currently or by 2020 are as follows

Ward	Variance 2015	Variance 2020
Central	+15%	+20%
Nascot	+ 11%	+ 8%
Oxhey	-8%	-11%
Tudor	-20%	-17%
Vicarage	+1%	+18%
Figures calculated by the LGBCE.		

Watford currently has 36 councillors elected by thirds with 12 wards of 3 councillors each. The wards have existed in recognisably their current form and with the same names since 1974, with minor amendments made in 1998, which was the date of the last boundary review

At the first stage of this review the borough council recommended and the Commission has said it is minded to agree that Watford should continue to have 36 councillors divided by 12 wards and elected by thirds. As nearly all the current wards are based on recognisable communities, in many cases with boundaries based on clearly identifiable geographical features (borough boundaries, main roads, rivers, railway lines) there is merit in maintaining continuity in so far as possible. Therefore in putting forward proposals to redress the anomalies in ward size, we believe there is merit in keeping changes to the minimum necessary to ensure that they conform to the 10% rule.

In considering this review we are aware that the level of variation between wards projected for 2020 is based on the implementation of major regeneration schemes in Vicarage and part of Holywell ward (Watford Health Campus) and at Watford Junction. Inevitably in such large-scale projects there is a degree of uncertainty about the timing of development and this has a potential impact on the review, in that moving ward boundaries within existing residential areas to allow for future development could leave wards with too few electors (more than 10% below average) in the short term with the possibility that this may continue beyond 2020 if for any reason the new development is delayed.

We will consider first the above wards where boundary changes are clearly necessary, before addressing whether changes are desirable in other wards that fall within the 10% limit.

Central, Tudor and Callowland

Central ward is significantly above the 10% margin both currently and in the 2020 projection (+15% and +20% respectively). Neighbouring Tudor ward by contrast is well under the

acceptable margin for both dates (-20% and -17%). This is capable of a very straightforward remedy, which brings both wards within acceptable margins both for 2015 and 2020, and respects local community identity.

We propose moving Polling District HA from Central into Tudor ward. This would have the following effect:

Ward	Electorate 2020	Variance 2020
Central	6,910	+6%
Tudor	6,252	-4%

Central ward comprises a group of distinct residential communities on the fringes of the town centre and for most of the ward there are clear boundaries: the River Colne, Rickmansworth Road, St Albans Road, Cassio–Merton–Wiggenhall Roads.

Polling District HA, comprising the Radlett Road estate and some houses on Radlett Road itself is an exception. It is geographically separated from the rest of the ward by the West Coast mainline railway – a significant physical boundary. It is outside the area that would be commonly understood as Central Watford. As a self-contained residential community, it has limited natural geographical links to neighbouring areas. However it already shares a polling station with the nearby Reeds Estate (Polling District FC) in Tudor ward. Its main point of access/egress is onto Radlett Road most of which is in Tudor ward. This change would have the advantage of having no knock-on impact on other wards in the borough. It would also establish a clearly identifiable boundary between the two wards.

While the core of Tudor ward is the inter-war Tudor estate, but also includes adjacent areas leading off Radlett Road and Bushey Mill Lane that would not be considered part of the estate. Adding Polling District HA would be a reasonably good fit with the rest of the ward. We have considered an alternative of moving part of Polling District EA from Callowland into Tudor. This area was part of Tudor ward prior to 1998. However, this would not solve the problem of the excessive number of electors in Central ward, which would require the removal from that ward of areas more commonly understood to be part of Central Watford. It would also affect Callowland, requiring more changes to other wards than are necessary. In addition, the boundary between Polling District EA and Tudor is a clearly identifiable one, in the form of Bushey Mill Lane and the 'Abbey Flyer' railway line. As a result, its links to Callowland appear stronger than to Tudor, as acknowledged in the previous boundary review (Local Government Commission Final Report, 1998, p.13.) We would therefore reject this option.

Oxhey, Park, Holywell and Vicarage wards

Although Vicarage ward currently has close to the average number of electors, its electorate is projected to be +18% above the average by 2020. Oxhey, although currently well within the 10% variance is projected to be at -11% by 2020. Park and Holywell wards are within the 10% range for both 2015 and 2020, but their boundaries may be affected by the need for more electors in Oxhey and fewer in Vicarage.

Oxhey ward is a community distinct from the rest of Watford, with many links to Bushey in Hertsmere Borough (for example local church parish boundaries; Bushey railway station being located in Oxhey). It has a strong boundary, being divided from the rest of Watford by

the River Colne and the green spaces of Oxhey Park and Riverside Recreation Ground. The ward boundary was unchanged in 1998 and indeed predates the 1974 review.

Nonetheless the projected shortfall in Oxhey's electorate and the increase in the number of voters in Vicarage ward means the boundary must be amended. We propose that the 'Riverside' area of the Watford Health Campus be included in Oxhey ward.

According to the current health campus masterplan, this would comprise the four blocks of flats which overlook the Colne Valley and Oxhey but omitting the houses that lead of Willow Lane (see attachment).

We estimate that this would add a future 400+ properties and around 640 electors to Oxhey (480 from Vicarage and 160 from Holywell). This would mean that by 2020 the electorate of Oxhey would be 1% below the borough average (as the ward is currently -8% and within the 10% margin there is no need to amend the boundary to include existing electors).

The boundary between Oxhey and Central/Vicarage wards can be amended to run down the centre of the new access road to be built linking Dalton Way to Watford General Hospital, deviating at the point where the road turns north towards Willow Lane.

These sections of the development will be separated from the rest of the health campus by the access road and will have at least as strong a relationship to Oxhey as they will to Vicarage ward. Their main access to the wider highway network will be to Wiggenhall Road. The hospital access road will be a strong and readily-identifiable boundary. It will also mean that this stretch of the Colne Valley is united within Oxhey ward, including the area of Oxhey Park north of the River Colne which currently lies in Central ward.

We considered the alternative of moving the boundary of Oxhey and Central to include the area of Polling District HE known as Watford Fields in Oxhey ward. However, this area is very clearly separate from Oxhey – divided by the River Colne, the Oxhey Park green space and a railway line and embankment. The new link road will increase the geographical barrier between Oxhey and Watford Fields, whose main community links are towards central Watford.

Vicarage and with Holywell wards comprise the area generally referred to as West Watford. The boundary between them (Hagden Lane and Queens Avenue) is clearly defined, but this does not mark a real division between communities. Although currently close to the average in size of electorate, Vicarage is projected to be 18% above average by 2020. As above, we have proposed correcting this in part by moving the boundary with Oxhey from the River Colne to the new hospital access road. We would further propose including the southern side of Mildred Avenue into Park ward. The northern side is already in Park ward and as this is a residential road rather than a major transport route, there is merit in including both sides within the same ward.

Although Holywell and Park are within the 10% variance, Holywell is currently at the maximum and will still be close to it in 2020. Although not strictly necessary in terms of numbers, it would make sense to include Bramleas, Cherrydale and Raven Close in Park ward. This would be a minor adjustment, would be consistent with the boundary including the southern side of Mildred Avenue in Park ward and would ensure Holywell remained within the 10% margin. Holywell's numbers would also be affected by the adjustment of the Oxhey ward boundary as proposed above.

The above changes keep all four wards within the 10% margin projected for 2020, as follows:

Ward	Electorate 2020	Variance 2020
Holywell	7,045	+8
Oxhey	6,423	-1%
Park	6,743	+4%
Vicarage	6,691	+3%

Nascot

Nascot ward has 11% more electors than the borough average, but is projected to be only 8% above average by 2020.

Nascot essentially comprises the area between St Albans Road, Hempstead Road, and the West Coast mainline. Each of these represents a clear boundary and gives the ward a strong identity and sense of community – differentiated from Cassiobury to the west, Central Watford to the south, and Leggatts and Callowland wards, which are seen as part of North Watford.

The need to prevent Nascot having too many electors means that the last boundary review included a short stretch of Hempstead Road/The Avenue/Stratford Road in Park ward and part of Courtlands Drive in Leggatts ward. Such changes were unavoidable given the need to achieve greater equality of ward electorates, but undesirable in terms of coherent boundaries.

Although Nascot remains just outside the 10% variance in 2015, it is likely to be within it by 2020. The electorate in Nascot has expanded in recent years due to major development (such as at Willow Grange and the former West Herts College site now known as Nascot Grange), but it is now likely to grow at a slower rate than the rest of the borough..

If the Commission considered it necessary to change the Nascot border there may be scope to do this either at the North-eastern edge (Courtlands Drive area) or the South-western (around Hempstead Road) but in each case this would mean transferring voters who would consider themselves part of the Nascot community into a ward that they do not really identify with. Given that Nascot is projected to down to +8% and within the 10% margin by 2020, and given its strong geographic and community identity, it would be preferable not to amend the ward boundary.

Leggatts and Callowland

Both these wards are within +/-4% of the average both in 2015 and 2020. Although there could be arguments for amending the boundaries between the two wards, there is no need to do so and we would propose no change for these wards.

Meriden, Tudor and Stanborough wards

These wards are all located on the northern side of the A41, which constitutes a significant barrier from the rest of the borough, being a dual carriageway for much of its length within Watford borough, creating a significant geographical barrier and creating a clear distinction between communities on either side of this major road. They are often referred to as distinct from the rest of Watford (Meriden and Stanborough being known as 'Garston' and Woodside either by its own name or as 'Leavesden'). In terms of community identity it is highly undesirable for ward boundaries to cross the A41. All three wards are currently well within the 10% variance in electorate, although the projections for 2020 will bring Stanborough and Woodside very close to the lower limit.

These three wards have very clear boundaries, in the form of St Albans Road (A412) and Kingsway/North Orbital (A405). Woodside is separated from the rest of the borough by dual carriageway and St Albans Road marks a clear division between Stanborough and Meriden.

Although it would be possible to create greater equality between the electorates, for example by moving the Kytes Drive/Coates Dell area into Woodside and/or the Cow Lane area into Stanborough, the attempt to equalise electorates would mean including electors in wards with which they do not really identify. We recognise that this does mean leaving Woodside and Stanborough close to the 10% margin, but consider that this is a lesser evil than amending clearly established boundaries that would leave small areas in wards with which the residents do not really identify.

Electoral data**Watford Borough Council**

15 June 2015: Watford Borough Council requested the use of a revised set of existing electorate figures taking into account the latest canvas of electors. The Council argued that these figures were more accurate than those originally published as they take into account the impact of Individual Elector Registration. The Commission has considered the Council's request and concurs that these figures are the most accurate available. These figures supersede those previously published.

Scroll right to see the second table

Polling district	Description of area	Parish	Parish ward	Grouped parish council	Existing ward	01/06/15	2020
AA					Woodside	2,107	2,203
AB					Woodside	1,044	1,093
AC					Woodside	2,441	2,557
BA					Stanborough	1,797	1,898
BB					Stanborough	1,659	1,735
BC					Stanborough	2,115	2,215
CA					Meriden	439	459
CB					Meriden	2,720	2,846
CC					Meriden	2,963	3,104
DA					Leggatts	2,582	2,707
DB					Leggatts	1,977	2,077
DC					Leggatts	1,524	1,594
EA					Callowland	1,380	1,443
EB					Callowland	2,365	2,481
EC					Callowland	1,983	2,464
FA					Tudor	739	774
FB					Tudor	3,382	3,537
FC					Tudor	660	1,075
GA					Nascot	1,856	1,942
GB					Nascot	4,736	5,039
HA					Central	684	866
HB					Central	2,017	2,359
HC					Central	1,399	1,488
HD					Central	1,633	1,914
HE					Central	1,077	1,149

Liberal Democrat Group Submission

Appendix 5

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