

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY RETURNING OFFICER AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

TO:	COUNCIL		
DATE:	4 NOVEMBER 2019		
TITLE:	LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION REVIEW OF WARD BOUNDARIES 2019-20		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLRS JASON BROCK/ ELLIE EMBERSON	PORTFOLIO:	LEADERSHIP/ CORPORATE & CONSUMER SERVICES
SERVICE:	ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION	WARDS:	BOROUGH-WIDE
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#### 1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 Further to Minutes 20 and 38 of Policy Committee on 15 July and 26 September 2019, to agree the authority's submission on warding patterns to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), as part of the LGBCE's first period of consultation, which ends today, as recommended to full Council by the cross-party Ward Boundary Review Working Party.
- 1.2 The LGBCE is undertaking an electoral review of the Council in its 2019-20 programme. This is because the 2017 canvass showed over 30% of the authority's current wards (5 out of 16) had a variance greater than 10% from the authority's average ratio of electors, which was 2,443 per Councillor or 7,329 per 3-member ward.
- 1.3 The LGBCE operates under the provisions of Part 3 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). This established the LGBCE in place of the former Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission. The last review of ward boundaries in Reading was undertaken by the former Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission between February 2001 and June 2002, and was implemented from June 2004.
- 1.4 The 2001/02 review established a Council of 46 Councillors, representing 16 wards, of which 15 were 3-member wards which held elections by thirds. The remaining ward was Mapledurham, with one Councillor being elected every four years. The first stage of the review process, concerning Council size, has been completed, with the LGBCE accepting the authority's submission, agreed by Policy Committee on 15 July 2019, that the authority continue to have elections by thirds, and that the number of Councillors be increased from 46 to 48, representing 16 three-member wards across the Borough, in recognition of the significant projected growth in the Borough's electorate, from 113,590 in 2019 to 121,002 in 2025 (an increase of 7,412 electors, or 6.5%).
- 1.5 The LGBCE's timetable for the review is set out in Table 1 in Section 4. The LGBCE commenced the second stage of the review process - public consultation on warding patterns - on 27 August 2019, to run to 4 November 2019. In line with the LGBCE's good practice advice, the Policy Committee on 26 September 2019 set up an advisory

cross-party Ward Boundary Review Working Party's to assist the development of the Council's response to the consultation. This Working Party has met twice, on 2 and 22 October 2019, to develop a submission for the authority to make to the LGBCE.

- 1.6 The note of the Working Party's meeting on 2 October 2019 is at **Appendix A**. This gives a summary of the LGBCE's review process and criteria, and sets out the principles and issues that the Working Party identified to be considered in developing a new proposal for ward patterns in the Borough.
- 1.7 The note of the Working Party's meeting on 22 October 2019 is at **Appendix B**. This sets out the proposal for 16 three-member wards across the Borough, developed and presented to the Working Party by me, in consultation with the Chair (Councillor Brock), within the general principles outlined by the Working Party at its meeting on 2 October 2019; and the discussion on those proposals that took place. The Working Party accepted the proposal for recommendation to full Council. The proposal had support from three of the Groups represented on the Working Party, but not the Green Group's representative (Councillor White).
- 1.8 A map showing the Working Party's proposals is at **Appendix C**. Table 2, in Section 5 below, sets out the 16 new three-member wards in the proposal, and their projected 2025 electorates.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- 2.1 That the detailed deliberations of the cross-party Working Party be noted and endorsed, and the map showing the Working Party's proposals be agreed and submitted to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England along with the supporting explanation (to follow and be circulated to all Councillors) as set out in the Minutes of the two Working Party meetings and this report.
- 2.2 That the suggested names of the 16 new wards be as shown in Table 2 in Section 5.

## 3. POLICY CONTEXT AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Under S56(1) of the 2009 Act, the Commission must, from time to time, conduct a review of the area of each principal council, and recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements. In this regard, electoral arrangements means (S56(4)):
  - The total number of Councillors
  - The number and boundaries of electoral areas for the election of Councillors
  - The number of Councillors to be returned by any electoral area
  - The name of the electoral area
- 3.2 Under S56(2), the Commission may conduct a review of all or any part of a principal council's electoral arrangements, including the number and boundaries of wards. In this regard, the Commission will be likely to conduct such a review in two circumstances:
  - If it considers, having had regard to the council's annual canvass returns, that the ratio of local government electors to Councillors in a ward or wards is out of balance
  - If a council requests the LGBCE to do a review, and the LGBCE agree that there are grounds to do so.

- 3.3. More details are given in Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act. Para. 2 relates to District Councils (which appears to include Unitary Authorities). This requires the LGBCE, in making its recommendations, to have regard to:
- a) The need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of Councillors is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area - over the 5 year period following implementation
  - b) The need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and, in particular the desirability of fixing boundaries:
    - o which are and will remain easily identifiable
    - o so as not to break any local ties
  - c) The need to secure effective and convenient local government
  - d) Where an authority has a scheme of election by thirds, as in Reading, the desirability of securing that each electoral area returns an appropriate number of Councillors.
- 3.4. The 2009 Act does not specify a timetable for these reviews, although the reference to the 5 year period following implementation carries an inference. However, the LGBCE review each council's annual canvass returns each year, and if they consider that a council is no longer securing the ratios specified in (a) above, the LGBCE will write to the council's chief executive to give notice that they will be conducting a boundary review.
- 3.5. In terms of the requirement to achieve equality of representation (see 3.3(a) above), the old Boundary Committee operated to statutory criteria which required ward electorates to be within 10% of the Borough average, and not to vary by more than 30% against each other. These statutory criteria have disappeared through the 2009 Act, but the LGBCE are still working to them.
- 3.6. In order to develop the Council's response to the LGBCE's ward review consultation, the Policy Committee on 26 September 2019 set up an advisory working group with a cross-party membership (6:3:1:1), with the following terms of reference:

To consider the Local Government Boundary Commission Review of Reading's Ward Boundaries 2019-20 and make observations and recommendations to the Council or Policy Committee on warding patterns for approval and submission to the Commission during the public consultation periods.

#### **4. REVIEW TIMETABLE**

- 4.1 The LGBCE started the review in November 2018, and plans to conclude it by 30 June 2020. The anticipated time-table for the review is in Table 1 as follows:

**Table 1 - LGBCE Timetable**

February / March 2019	Preliminary meetings held with officers, group leaders and councillors
20 August 2019	Commission agree total number of councillors for authority
27 August 2019 - to 4 November 2019	First public consultation period inviting proposals for warding patterns
21 January 2020	Commission agree draft recommendations
4 February 2020 - to 13 April 2020	Second consultation on draft recommendations
16 June 2020	Commission agree final recommendations
30 June /2020	Final recommendations published
Autumn 2020	Order laid in Parliament

4.2 The new electoral arrangements will be implemented at an 'all-out' election in 2022.

## 5. PROPOSAL

5.1 The proposal is for 16 three-member wards, based on the 2025 projected electorate figures, with an average ward electorate of 7,563 (2,521 electors per Councillor), and falling within an electoral equality range 6,807 to 8,319. It is summarised in Table 2 below:

**Table 2 - Ward Proposal**

	Ward	No. Cllrs	2025 electorate	Gaining	Losing	TOTAL 2025	Variation from average	% variation
A	The Heights	3	2512 7501	-	2875	7626	63	1
B	Emmer Green	3	7698	516	488	7726	162	2
C	Caversham	3	7515	2875	2593	7797	231	3
D	Thames	3	-	6902	-	6902	-662	-9
E	Abbey	3	-	7652	-	7652	89	1
F	Park	3	6987	734	-	7710	147	2
G	Redlands	3	5751	3487	1473	7801	238	3
H	Church	3	-	8109	642	7467	-96	-1
I	Whitley	3	-	7119	-	7119	-444	-6
J	Katesgrove	3	7522	248	-	7770	207	3
K	Minster	3	7622	693	1129	7186	377	5
L	Southcote	3	6677	881	167	7541	-22	0
M	Norcot	3	7940	98	206	7832	269	4
N	Battle	3	8398	148	694	7852	289	4
O	Kentwood	3	7513	-	-	7513	-50	-1
P	Tilehurst	3	7380	137	-	7517	-46	-1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>				<b>121,011</b>		

Please note that the total electorate figure of 121,011 in Table I above exceeds the 2025 electorate projection of 121,002 agreed with the LGBCE, by 9 electors. This disparity of 0.007% is considered *de minimis*.

5.2 Table 2 should be compared with the projection of electorate for the authority's current wards to 2025, as agreed with the LGBCE and set out in Table 3 below. Please note that the 2025 electorate projection in this is for the existing wards, and an authority of 46 Councillors. The average electorate per three-member ward is 7,407 in 2019 (2,469 electors per Councillor); and in 2025 is 7,890 (2,630 electors per Councillor). The LGBCE electoral equality ranges for 2019 and 2025, on current arrangements, are as follows:

2019	6,666 to 8,148	Average = 7,407
2025	6,807 to 8,319	Average = 7,890

**Table 3 - Projection of 2025 Electorate on Current Wards**

Name of ward	No. Cllrs	Electorate 2019	Variance 2019 %	Electorate 2025	Variance 2015 %
Abbey	3	9581	29	12477	58

Battle	3	7943	7	8398	6
Caversham	3	7382	0	7515	-5
Church	3	6521	-12	6865	-13
Katesgrove	3	6951	-6	7522	-5
Kentwood	3	7326	-1	7513	-5
Mapledurham	1	2504	1	2512	-5
Minster	3	7336	-1	7622	-3
Norcot	3	7683	4	7940	1
Park	3	6811	-8	6987	-11
Peppard	3	7544	2	7698	-2
Redlands	3	5548	-25	5751	-27
Southcote	3	6709	-9	6827	-13
Thames	3	7457	1	7501	-5
Tilehurst	3	7224	-2	7380	-6
Whitley	3	9070	22	10494	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>113,590</b>		<b>121,002</b>	

5.3 Table 3 shows that, on present ward boundaries, and on the 2019 local electorate, 2019, four wards currently fall outside the LGBCE's electoral equality range for 2019, three substantially (Abbey 22% over the average ward electorate, Whitley 33% over, and Redlands 25% under). On a forward projection to 2025, six wards will fall outside the electoral equality range, with Abbey growing to 58% over and Whitley to 33% over; Redlands falling to 27% under; and Church, Park and Southcote all showing variances under in the low teens.

5.4 Table 4 below shows the growth in projected electorate by current ward four wards

**Table 4 - Projected Growth in Electorate**

Name of ward	No. CIIrs	Electorate 2019	Electorate 2025	Growth	% Increase
Abbey	3	9581	12477	2896	30
Battle	3	7943	8398	455	6
Caversham	3	7382	7515	133	2
Church	3	6521	6865	344	5
Katesgrove	3	6951	7522	571	8
Kentwood	3	7326	7513	187	3
Mapledurham	1	2504	2512	8	0.3
Minster	3	7336	7622	286	4
Norcot	3	7683	7940	257	3
Park	3	6811	6987	176	3
Peppard	3	7544	7698	154	2
Redlands	3	5548	5751	203	4
Southcote	3	6709	6827	118	2
Thames	3	7457	7501	44	1
Tilehurst	3	7224	7380	156	2
Whitley	3	9070	10494	1424	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>113,590</b>	<b>121,002</b>	<b>7412</b>	<b>7</b>

This shows very significant growth in two wards: Abbey and Whitley, totalling 4,320 electors, which is 58% of all projected electorate growth in the Borough. It should be

noted that the projected electorate growth to 2025 in the four wards currently north of the River Thames totals 339, or under 5% of total Borough electorate growth.

- 5.5 The Working Party recognised, at its first meeting, that on the above electorate and growth projections, it would not be possible to sustain four three-member wards north of the River Thames. The total projected 2025 electorate for the current four wards of Caversham, Mapledurham, Peppard and Thames is 25,226, which would give an average ward electorate of 6,307, well below the LGBCE's projected average electorate of 7,563 for a three-member ward in a Council of 48 Councillors. Therefore the Working Party accepted that the River Thames could no longer be treated as a boundary and would need to be crossed in order to achieve electoral equality across the Borough. The Working Party identified the Great Western railway line as the possible southern boundary for a fourth three-member ward which would cross the river.
- 5.6 The proposal recommended to the Working Party on 22 October 2019 included a new ward - ward D - which crosses the River Thames, and brings together communities on both sides of the river. However, to achieve electoral equality, this new ward has had to include some parts of Abbey ward south of the railway line. The minute of the Working Party on 22 October (Appendix B) sets out the discussion that took place around this point. The Working Party's recommendation is that ward D (with the suggested name of River ward) take in Caversham ward south from Church Road, Church Street and Gosbrook Road, the current Abbey polling district L (North of railway), and current Abbey polling district LC (Kenavon Drive and Orts Road).
- 5.7 The proposal also set out new warding arrangements for east and south Reading, to address the growth in electorate in Whitley ward and the reduced student electorates (as a result of Individual Electoral Registration) in the wards around University area, Redlands, Park and Church. The proposal extends Redlands ward southwards into the northern parts of Church ward, to bring all of the University area in Reading into one ward; and re-aligns Church and Whitley ward to link communities on either side of Northumberland Avenue. A small area of north-east Redlands ward, to the north of Erleigh Road and west of Eastern Avenue, is moved to Park ward. All proposed wards (F to I) achieve electoral equality.
- 5.8 The Working Party has recommended less extensive changes for wards in west Reading, including Katesgrove, to address in particular the reduced electorate in Southcote and a growing electorate in Battle ward. The changes move the boundary between Katesgrove and Minster wards to Rose Kiln Lane rather than the River Kennet. The proposal achieves electoral equality in all wards affected. Minor changes are made to the boundaries between Norcot, Battle, Southcote and Tilehurst wards, primarily to avoid ward boundaries running along residential roads. No change has been considered necessary for Kentwood ward.
- 5.9 The Working Party considered names for the 16 three-member wards recommended in the proposal, which are given in Table 2 above. The Working Party discussed changing the name of Minister Ward to Coley Ward. Following the Working Party meeting of the 22<sup>th</sup> October I have received strong representations from the 3 Minister Councillors that the name of the ward should remain as Minster. None of the Minster Councillors could see any reasonable rationale for the name change. As a consequence it is proposed that the name of the proposed ward will remain as Minster.
- 5.10 The Working Party had members from all four political groups, with a 6:3:1:1 proportional membership. The Leaders of all four Groups are members; Councillor Brock is the Chair.

5.11 The proposal presented to the Council with this report was supported by three political groups on the Working Party; it was not supported by Councillor White. The Working Party, on 22 October, considered but did not support alternative suggestions made by Councillor White, which concerned Park, Redlands and Abbey wards. These were set out for the Working Party in my report to it, and also on a plan of all suggested changes, tabled at the meeting. Councillor White was reminded that he and his Group had the opportunity to respond directly to the LGBCE as part of their public consultation exercise seeking views on ward boundary proposals for Reading, which ends today.

## 6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

6.1 The ward boundary review goes to the heart of promoting local democracy and electoral equality for local residents. It supports the promotion of the participation of Reading people in local democracy.

## 7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The LGBCE has already started the process of consultation with the Council, as described above in section 4.

## 8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 In this regard you must consider whether the decision will or could have a differential impact on: racial groups; gender; people with disabilities; people of a particular sexual orientation; people due to their age; people due to their religious belief.

8.3 It is not considered that an equality impact assessment is necessary for the purpose of responding to the LGBCE on the number of Councillors or ward boundaries. In this respect it is recognised that Reading is a thriving multi-cultural community, which is reflected in the composition of the current Council, and ward electorate.

## 9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

9.1 There are no environmental concerns as a result of the LGBCE's review of ward boundaries in Reading.

## 10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The 2018/19 budget for electoral registration is £327k, and the budget for local elections is £190k: the cost of the review has been met from within these.

10.2 If the number of Councillors is increased by two to 48 Councillors this will increase the Councillors' Allowance budget by £16,440pa. The individual Councillor Allowance is to be linked to the increase in Local Government pay.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Reports and maps submitted to the Ward Boundary Review Working Party

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**WARD BOUNDARY REVIEW WORKING PARTY**  
**2 OCTOBER 2019**

**Present:** Councillor Brock (Chair)  
Councillors Davies, Duveen, Jones, McEwan, Skeats, Stevens, Stanford-Beale  
J Painter (JP), P Harrington (PH) (on behalf of C Brooks, Returning Officer)

**Apologies:** Councillors Leng and White

**To Discuss:**

Further to Minute 15 of Policy Committee on 26 September 2019, to consider the authority's submission on warding patterns to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), as part of the LGBCE's first period of consultation, which ends on Monday 4 November 2019, for approval by full Council on that date.

**Introduction**

JP set the context for the review, as explained in the Returning Officer's report to Policy Committee on 15 July 2019. The last review of ward boundaries in Reading had taken place in 2001-02, implemented in 2004. In the intervening 15-18 years, three wards – Abbey, Whitley and Redlands - had moved significantly out of kilter from the average number of electors, with three more wards – Church, Southcote and Park – on the edge of a -10% discrepancy. The LGBCE had given the Council notice in 2018 of its intention to include Reading in its 2019-20 review programme, and had held briefing sessions for Councillors on 28 January and 26 March 2019. The first stage of the review process, concerning Council size, had been completed, with the LGBCE accepting the authority's submission (agreed by Policy Committee on 15 July 2019) that the authority continue to have elections by thirds, and that the number of Councillors be increased from 46 to 48, representing 16 three-member wards across the Borough, in recognition of the significant projected growth in the Borough's population and electorate to 2025.

The LGBCE had commenced the second stage of the review process – the public consultation on warding patterns – on 27 August 2019, which will run to 4 November 2019. Arising from this, it will publish draft recommendations for ward patterns on 21 January 2020, which will be the subject of a second period of public consultation running from 4 February to 13 April 2020. The LGBCE will make its final decision on 16 June 2020, which will be implemented at the Borough elections in May 2022, at which date all serving Councillors will retire and all-out elections will be held for all 48 seats across all 16 wards.

**Review Criteria**

The LGBCE will review ward patterns with reference to the following statutory criteria:

- Electoral equality between wards
- The interests and identities of local communities
- Ensuring effective and convenient local government

**Electoral Equality**

The LGBCE review will focus on the projected electorate by 2025. The Council and LGBCE have settled this, based on projections of new residential development by ward and polling district over the next

six years. The agreed projections show the Borough electorate growing from 113,590 in 2019 to **121,002 in 2025**, an increase of 7,412 electors (6.5%). With the move from 46 to 48 Councillors, the average number of electors per Councillor will rise from 2,469 (2019) to **2,521** (2025); the average electorate of a three-member ward will rise from 7,407 (2019) to **7,563** (2025).

The LGBCE allow a tolerance of +/- 10% from the average Council ward electorate when reviewing ward patterns. On this basis, the projected ward electorates in 2025 will need to be within the **range of 6,807 to 8,319 electors**.

On the projected ward electorates for 2025, four current wards fall outside this range:

• Abbey	12,477	+ 4,914	65% over
• Whitley	10,494	+ 2,931	39% over
• Battle	8,398	+ 835	11% over
• Redlands	5,751	- 1,812	24% under

In addition, three further current wards are approaching the lower limit of the range, as follows:

• Southcote	6,827	- 736	9.7% under
• Church	6,865	- 698	9.2% under
• Park	6,987	- 576	7.6% under

All other wards have projected electorates between 7,000 and 8,000.

The four current wards in Caversham, north of the River Thames, have a projected 2025 electorate of 25,226. Four three-member wards north of the River Thames would give an average electorate of 6,306 per ward, which is 500 electors below the lower range figure. Three three-member wards north of the River Thames would give an average ward electorate of 8,409, which is 90 electors above the higher range ceiling. Therefore it will not be possible to retain the River Thames as a boundary: to meet the electoral equality criterion, at least one ward will need to cross the river.

The six current wards covering the town centre and east and south Reading have a projected 2025 electorate of 50,096. This would give an average ward electorate of 8,394, which again is above the higher range ceiling. This area includes Abbey, Whitley and Redlands wards, all of which fall significantly outside the range; and Church and Park, which are above the lower ceiling but where the impact of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has seen a significant reduction in the student and HMO vote (as in Redlands).

The six current wards in west Reading have a projected 2025 electorate of 45,680, which gives an average ward electorate of 7,613, comfortably within the range. Of these wards, some attention will need to be given to Battle and Southcote wards.

At the instruction of the LGBCE, the electorate projections are based on the status quo and do not anticipate any post-Brexit reduction in the number of electors who are EU citizens. Nor do they presume any increase in student registration. In terms of new electorate projections, they do not include developments of fewer than 20 dwellings; nor conversions to flats under permitted development. The cut-off date of 2025 also means that major anticipated new developments in Abbey ward, on the north side of the station, have not been factored into the elector projections for Abbey ward and the town centre, but this could be put forward as an explanation for supporting a 2025 ward electorate in the lower half of the tolerance range.

## Local Communities

Within the above context, the Working Party considered the identification of local communities and boundaries to inform and be recognised in ward patterns. In doing so, it accepted for the reasons

given above that the River Thames could no longer be treated as a boundary, and indeed there were good grounds for recognising the Thames water meadows as a shared facility between the communities living on either side of the river, which had been enhanced by the new (third) river crossing, the Christchurch foot-and-cycle bridge.

In the ensuing discussion, the following were identified:

#### Boundaries

- Railway lines – both the Great Western main line (east-west) and the lines to Newbury and Basingstoke to the south.
- Kennet flood plain – in particular the physical barrier it places between Coley / Southcote and new development in Green Park Whitley), and the absence of any roads between the two
- A33 relief road

#### Communities

- Avoid splitting recognised housing estates, in particular Southcote, Coley Park (Minster), Amersham Road (Caversham), Hexham Road (Redlands), Whitley Park and Whitley Wood (Whitley and Church) – whilst having a tenure mix in each ward
- Shared community facilities parks and shopping centres – in particular Prospect Park (Southcote) and the Meadow Centre (Norcot)
- Student Halls and residential areas around the University – currently split between Redlands and Church
- Victorian / Edwardian south and east Reading around Erleigh and Crescent Roads (Redlands, Park)
- Primary school catchments – linking new and existing communities - Kennet Island and Whitley Park (Whitley)
- Residential communities in the town centre – may be disparate with each other, but have strong connections to the town centre in terms of services, parking, transport use etc.

The meeting recognised that Abbey ward, covering the town centre, would need to be treated flexibly in order to get electoral equality north of the River Thames and in south and east Reading, and that an outside-in approach should be followed, whilst retaining the core of the town centre in one ward, to best represent its interests.

The meeting considered that arterial roads could serve both as communities and effective boundaries. The reasons for treating such roads as boundaries should be understood. In some cases this was historic and mitigated against community identity – in particular Northumberland Avenue in south Reading (Whitley, Church), where its use as a boundary had resulted in the local community being split between two parliamentary constituencies.

Where roads were used as boundaries, consideration should be given to whether the boundary should run down the centre of the road, or along the back gardens of properties in the road to include both sides in one ward.

#### **Ward Patterns**

Flowing from the above discussion, the Working Party identified the following specific issues and suggestions:

- The Great Western (east-west) railway line to be the southern boundary for one ward which crossed the River Thames to take in Caversham town centre – based on the Thames flood meadows
- Park, Redlands, Katesgrove

- Extend Park ward westwards along north of Erleigh Road, to take in older Victorian streets to the north-east of Redlands ward.
  - Redlands ward to extend southwards to take in residential streets, and student halls in the north of Church ward (northern part of polling district Church N)
  - Redlands ward to include Christchurch Green shopping centre (in Church N)
  - The Hexham Road estate (southern part of Redlands polling district RB) may have a stronger link into south Reading.
- South Reading
  - Combine southern part of Church with Whitley to form two new wards, including new developments to west of Basingstoke Road
  - Consider east-west alignments instead of current north-south split along Northumberland Avenue – possibly with Hartland Road as boundary
  - No community of interests between new developments in Green Park and Kennet Island - Kennet Island more aligned to Whitley Park and Basingstoke Road, to east of A33 relief road (as now – polling district Whitley S).
  - Basingstoke Road and Northumberland Avenue have community focus and services; A33 relief road is more of a communication barrier
  - Green Park residential development too small to support its own three-member ward – communication links towards south Whitley and M4 Junction 11.
- Battle, Minster, Southcote
  - Southcote to gain part of polling district Minster DA, to west of railway line (east of Liebenrood Road)
  - Minster to gain southern part of polling district AC from Battle, to east of railway line
  - Battle to lose land north of GWR railway line to new ward crossing River Thames (Little John's Farm – Thames water meadows – no electors to speak of)
- Kentwood, Norcot, Tilehurst
  - Stone Street area of polling district Kentwood CC – to east of Norcot roundabout – no affinity with Kentwood ward, could move to Norcot.
- North Reading
  - New ward crossing river to take in parts of Caversham town centre and Lower Caversham
  - Single-member Mapledurham ward cannot continue
  - Need to review all ward boundaries north of River Thames to provide 3 three-member wards in addition to new ward crossing river.
- Abbey
  - Loss of polling district L to new ward crossing river (north of GWR railway line)
  - Option to review outlier in polling district LB, south of Queen's Road (St John's) and include in either Katesgrove or Redlands

## **Next Steps**

- 1) Local Councillors to consider ward patterns for the four wards in north Reading, north of the GWR railway line;**
- 2) All Councillors to let Cllr Brock and CB/JP have any further suggestions for revised ward patterns, by Monday 14 October 2019;**
- 3) CB / JP to work up the proposals outlined above, and other suggestions received, with ward maps and electorate figures, for presentation to a further meeting of the Working Party to be held on Tuesday 22 October, at 18.00.**

**DRAFT**  
**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**WARD BOUNDARY REVIEW WORKING PARTY**  
**22 OCTOBER 2019**

**Present:** Councillor Brock (Chair)  
Councillors Duveen, Jones, Leng, McEwan, Page, Skeats, Stanford-Beale, White  
C Brooks (ERO), J Painter

**Apologies:** Councillors Davies and Stevens

**To Discuss:**

Further to the meeting on 2 October 2019, the Working Party considered a proposal by the ERO for the authority's submission on warding patterns to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), based on the discussion at that meeting. The following documents had been circulated to inform the Working Party's discussion:

- Note of meeting on 2 October 2019
- Ward Boundary Review – Proposal – report by ERO
- Map 1 – Existing Wards
- Map 2 – Proposed New Wards (16 wards numbered A to P)
- Map 3 – Overlay of Map 1 on Map 2
- Map 4 – Map 2 with proposed areas of change shown in yellow (tabled)
- Email from Councillor White, dated 15 October 2019, setting out proposals for current Park and Redlands ward (new wards F and G)

The ERO explained that the ward boundary proposal, supported by map 2, had been developed in consultation with the Chair, within the general principles outlined by the Working Party on 2 October 2019. The report explained the thinking behind the proposal, and cross-referred this to the previous Working Party. It further summarised the suggestions made by Councillor White; and the clarification received from Councillor Lovelock (Norcot ward councillor) concerning the proposals for new ward M (Norcot).

ERO tabled an updated version of Map 4, incorporating Councillor White's suggestions, and adding further areas of possible change on the northern boundary of new ward D (crossing the River Thames), and in new ward O (Kentwood). The map also gave the number of electors affected in each marked area.

**Proposal**

The proposal was for 16 three-member wards, based on the 2025 projected electorate figures, with an average ward electorate of 7,563, and falling within an electoral equality range 6,807 to 8,319. It was summarised in the following table.

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	Ward	2025 electorate	Gaining	Losing	TOTAL	Variation from average	% variation
A	The Heights	2512 7501	-	2875	7626	63	1
B	Emmer Green	7698	516	488	7726	162	2
C	Caversham	7515	2875	2593	7797	231	3
D	Thames	-	6902	-	6902	-662	-9
E	Abbey	-	7652	-	7652	89	1
F	Park	6987	734	-	7710	147	2
G	Redlands	5751	3487	1473	7801	238	3
H	Church	-	8109	642	7467	-96	-1
I	Whitley	-	7119	-	7119	-444	-6
J	Katesgrove	7522	248	-	7770	207	3
K	Coley	7622	693	1129	7186	377	5
L	Southcote	6677	881	167	7541	-22	0
M	Norcot	7940	98	206	7832	269	4
N	Battle	8398	148	694	7852	289	4
O	Kentwood	7513	-	-	7513	-50	-1
P	Tilehurst	7380	137	-	7517	-46	-1
	<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>121,011</b>		

The report noted that all 16 ward proposals were within the electoral equality range. They included a new ward D, crossing the River Thames, with 6,902 electors in 2025, which was above the minimum ward range of 6,807, and where the projection for new-build in Abbey L ward, north of the station, after 2025 would give a growth in electorate of a further 2,071.

#### North Reading and Town Centre

The Working Party on 2 October 2019 had recognised that the River Thames should no longer be treated as a boundary, and would need to be crossed in order to achieve electoral equality across the Borough; and had identified the Great Western railway line as a possible southern boundary for the proposed new ward (D), crossing the river. The report explained that proposed ward D included all of Abbey L polling district, with 2,770 electors in 2025; and 2,077 electors from Caversham ward. However, this did not give enough electors to meet electoral equality, therefore it also included Abbey LC polling district (2,055 electors in 2025), which was south of the railway line and covered both Kenavon Drive (1,179 electors) and the Orts Road estate (876 electors). This was an area of the town centre where there was significant projected growth. Its inclusion in ward D, however, was at variance from the discussion at the last Working Group. The report noted that if polling district Abbey LC was removed from ward D, its projected electorate fell to 4,847, which was 2,716, or 36%, below the 7,563 average electorate, and did not meet electoral equality.

The northern boundary of ward D was Church Road, Church Street, and Gosbrook Road (both sides). The report advised that there was scope to move more electors from streets north of that line into ward D, possibly up to around 930, as an alternative to Abbey LC, if the town centre part of Caversham were to be included in ward D. This would take ward D's projected electorate to over 5,900, not including Abbey LC. It might then be possible to persuade the Boundary Commission that the small ward anticipated the post-2025 projections of electorate growth.

The report also noted that if Abbey LC polling district was not put into ward D, then its 2,055 projected electors will have to be included elsewhere. The town centre ward (E – 7,652 electors) had scope for absorbing some, but not all, of them. Given their location, the most obvious alternative ward would be wards F and G, northern extensions of Park and/or Redlands wards (see below for elector numbers in

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these areas). The town centre ward E could lose its southern outlier, in the St John's area, to Katesgrove or Redlands ward, or both: there are 877 electors in this area.

### South and East Reading

The projections for south Reading worked, and accommodated the projected electorate growth in Whitley ward. They provided for two wards (H and I) covering Whitley in south Reading, both crossing the Northumberland Avenue spine road; with ward G, covering Redlands, also taking in the northern part of Church ward N polling district, around the university. The proposal kept the Hexham Road estate in ward G.

### West Reading

The changes required west of the Basingstoke / Newbury railway line were less extensive, and became marginal as they moved further west. No change was proposed for Kentwood ward.

The report clarified the proposals for ward M (Norcot), which looked to stop using local roads as ward boundaries, as follows:

- Run eastern boundary with ward N (Battle) along rear gardens of Wilson Road so both sides of road are in ward
- Move western end of Usk Road (both sides) into ward P (Tilehurst) - from entrance to Church End School/ Severn Way junction
- Move all of Cockney Hill into ward M (from ward L - Southcote) so both sides of road are in ward

### **Other Suggestions**

The report summarised the suggestions made by Councillor White, on behalf of the Green Group, which had been made independently of the proposal and referred to existing Park and Redlands wards (both of which had low projected electorates), as follows:

#### Park ward (ward F)

- Extend north-westwards to take in Orts Road estate from Abbey LC – 876 electors
- Extend northwards to cross Kennet and take in Kenavon Drive from Abbey LC, up to railway line - 1,179 electors

#### Redlands ward (ward G)

- Extend southwards into Church ward. The above proposal for ward G does this, moving the northern part of polling district Church N, down to Cressingham Road, with 2,157 electors.
- Move the St John's area of Abbey LB into Redlands – 877 electors
- Move the west side of Kendrick Road from Katesgrove into Redlands ward – 50 electors
- Move the west side of Eldon Road from Abbey LB to Redlands – 63 electors
- Move the eastern side of Eastern Avenue from Park PA to Redlands – 146 electors.

### **Discussion**

The Working Group discussed the proposal. Councillor White expressed reservations about the process, and that his suggestions had not been included in the proposal. It was reiterated that the proposal had been developed in line with the general principles agreed at the Working Party meeting on 2 October, which Councillor White had not attended. The Working Party had received a copy of Councillor White's suggestions, and the ERO had summarised them in his report for consideration alongside the proposal. Map 4, tabled at the meeting, included Cllr White's suggestions and the numbers of electors affected.

### North Reading and the Town Centre

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The principal focus of discussion was on proposed new ward D, crossing the River Thames, its impact on wards C (Caversham) and E (town centre), and the fact that, to achieve electoral equality, it included polling district Abbey LC, which was south of the GWR railway line. This was noted with some regret, and alternative options were explored.

The possibility of having two wards crossing the River Thames was discussed but not supported: the Thames was seen as a riverside community on both sides, with two road and two pedestrian crossing points, which should not be divided.

The ERO, and Map 4, identified options for moving into ward D two areas of Caversham town centre, north of Church Street and the western part of Gosbrook Road, which together comprised the northern part of polling district Caversham MA (up to what was the Prince of Wales pub, at the junction of Prospect Street, Henley Road and Peppard Road) with 929 and 138 electors respectively. The ERO noted that such a move would impact on ward C (Caversham) and require further changes to bring the remaining three Caversham wards north of the river into electoral balance: this would be possible, but it would leave all three wards below the 7,652 electoral average, in a part of Reading where there was little forward projected residential growth to 2025.

Polling district LC, comprised two distinct communities: to the north around Kenavon Drive, between the railway line and the River Kennet (1,179 electors); and the Orts Road estate to the south of the Kennet (876 electors). The Kenavon Drive area was an area of projected residential growth (involving around 400 new electors) associated with its proximity to the railway station, which was also the focus of future projected growth in Abbey L polling district. Kenavon Dive was the only road into the area, which had pedestrian links north (into Abbey L) through a tunnel under the railway, and south (to the Orts Road estate and also to Newtown in Park P) by a pedestrian bridge over the Kennet. The Orts Road estate looked to the town centre.

The Working Party accepted the proposal to establish three three-member wards in Caversham wholly north of the River Thames, in addition to the new ward crossing the river. They were made up as follows:

- Ward A - Mapledurham ward (Y), Thames ward polling districts W and WA, plus a small part of Peppard polling district V around Hightown school, to the south and west of St Barnabas Road (around Grove Road – 488 electors)
- Ward B – Peppard ward, minus the area around Grove Road mentioned above, but gaining the northern tip of Thames WB polling district, around Surley Row (168 electors), and also the far western part of Thames WB (Mayfield Drive – 348 electors). The latter addressed a long-standing adverse legacy of the 2001 review which had moved this area out of its natural community along the Henley Road and away from its local polling place at Micklands School.
- Ward C – The northern part of Caversham ward, above Church Road, Church Street and Gosbrook Road, together with most of Thames polling district WB which had been moved from Caversham ward in the 2001 review.

### East and South Reading

The ERO reminded the Working Party that if either or both communities in Abbey LC were not to be included in new ward D (crossing the river), they would need to be put elsewhere. Keeping either in the proposed town centre ward (E) would take that ward's projected electorate (7,652) over the 8,319 ceiling.

Councillor White's suggestions had involved moving either community into Park ward (F), which had a projected 2025 electorate of 6,987. Either would give a workable ward electorate (Kenavon Drive – 8,166; Orts Roads - 7,863), but the two together would exceed the ceiling. Kenavon Drive was in the

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school catchment area for the primary schools in the Orts Road and Newtown, accessed by the pedestrian bridge over the Kennet. There was discussion about the relationship between the Orts Road estate (1960s Council development) and Newtown (early C20th terraced streets), with Councillor White (local Councillor -Park) seeing the Orts Road estate as part of Newtown and Councillor Page (local Councillor - Abbey) disagreeing.

Neither suggestion would work with the proposal to transfer the north-eastern pocket of Redlands ward (ward G) into ward F (723 electors), as suggested at the Working Party meeting on 2 October 2019, which gave ward F (Park) an electorate of 7,710, a little above the average.

The proposal for ward G, comprising Redlands and the northern part of Church N polling district, brought all of the university area in Reading into one ward, in line with the discussions at the Working Party on 2 October 2019. It took the southern boundary of the ward down to Cressingham Road, which also involved the transfer into the ward of the Staverton Road area of Church NB polling district, north of Cressingham Road. With the loss of the north-eastern pocket to ward F, this gave ward G a projected electorate of 7,801. Ward G continued to include the Hexham Road estate, which lay immediately north of Staverton Road with a footpath link both to the Hexham Road community centre and local secondary school (Reading Girls). This was seen as addressing the concerns about the Hexham Road estate's separation from the local north Whitley community, made at the meeting on 2 October 2019.

The Working Party was happy with the proposals for central and south Whitley (new wards H and I), where ward I absorbed the projected growth in electorate in the Green Park development. Ward H comprised the residential part of Whitley S and SC polling districts, the Church NA polling district, and the southern parts of Church NA and NB polling districts (south of Cressingham Road). The southern boundary was Hartland Road, with Church NC polling district moving to new ward I, along with Whitley SA and SB polling districts. It considered that the boundary between new wards in the west should not follow the A33 relief road, but should continue to run westwards, south of the sewage works, to the Basingstoke railway line, north of where the new Green park station is being developed. The number of electors living north of this line (in Island Road) was *de minimus*.

The Working Party noted, but did not discuss, the proposal to move the western boundary of ward J (Katesgrove) from the River Kennet to the A33 relief road, which added 248 electors to the ward.

### West Reading

This proposal in west Reading generated less discussion. The changes proposed for the south west and north eastern boundaries of ward M (Norcot) were discussed: these were principally to avoid ward boundaries running along residential roads, and thereby not dividing roads between two wards.

There was discussion about where the eastern part of Katesgrove CC ward (around Stone Street) should go. This was to the east of the Norcot roundabout, and had more affinity with Battle ward north of the Oxford Road. The Working Party noted that the area had been moved into Kentwood ward in the 2001 review, to make that ward electorally equal; and the proposal kept it in ward O (Kentwood) for the same reason.

The Working Party noted, but did not discuss, the proposals for wards K (Minster), Southcote (ward L) and Battle wards (ward N), which moved outlier areas to achieve greater electoral equality. They moved the part of Minster DA polling district west of the Newbury and Basingstoke railway line into ward L (Southcote), where there was greater community affinity (881 electors); and the southern part of Battle AC polling district, south of the Oxford Road (693 electors), into ward K (Minster), to help reduce the electorate of ward N (Battle) to nearer the electoral average. As mentioned above, the

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proposal involved ward K (Minster) losing 248 electors living between Rose Kiln Lane and the River Kennet on the eastern boundary to ward J (Katesgrove).

### **Conclusion**

The Working Party noted that Reading was a small, compact urban settlement with arterial lines of communication focused on a strongly centripetal town centre. In this respect, discussion of community interests could sometimes be academic and not recognise the integrated nature of the Borough. It was important that there was a ward that represented the interests of the town centre, whilst recognising that the residential areas around the town centre may be disparate with each other, but had strong connections to the town centre in terms of services, parking, transport use etc. The Working Party, at its meeting on 2 October 2019, had recognised that the town centre would need to be treated flexibly in order to get electoral equality north of the River Thames and in south and east Reading, and an outside-in approach had therefore been followed in developing the proposal.

### **Next Steps**

**With one exception, the Working Party was happy to accept the proposal submitted by the ERO for recommendation to full Council on 4 November 2019, for submission to the LGBCE on the same day.**

**AGREED**

**Councillor White registered his dissatisfaction with those parts of the proposal concerning wards D, E, F and G, insofar as they did not reflect his suggestions. The Chair and ERO both made clear to Councillor White that he, and the Reading Green party, were free to make their own representations directly to the LGBCE as part of the Commission's wider public consultation exercise, which would end on 4 November 2019.**

**The Working Party considered names for the 16 wards included in the proposal. These are as shown in the table above.**

**The Working Party noted that the deadline for the production of reports for inclusion in the printed agenda for the Council meeting on Monday 4 November 2019 was Friday 25 October (Friday that week). It accepted that this may require the ETRO to submit a process report, explaining that the detailed proposal would follow.**

**Given the timescales involved, and the support given to the proposal by Councillors from three of the four Groups present, the Working Party did not see the need to arrange a further meeting before 4 November to sign off the proposal, and was content to leave this to the ERO in consultation with the Chair.**

**The Working Group noted that its terms of reference, as set by Policy Committee on 26 September 2019, included making 'observations and recommendations to the Council or Policy Committee on warding patterns for approval and submission to the Commission during the public consultation periods'; and in this light it recognised that it was empowered to meet again in the new year to consider and respond to the LGBCE's draft recommendations for Reading, to be issued on 4 February 2020.**

(the meeting started at 18.00 and closed at 19.05)