

## **Rationale for Ward Boundary Review Proposals for Warwick District Council.**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report sets out the rationale for Warwick District Council's proposals in relation to the Ward Boundary Review currently being undertaken by the Boundary Commission.
- 1.2 The Council's work on the Ward Boundary Review has been carried out by a Member Working Party of all 4 Group Leaders and the Deputy Leader of the Council, supported by the Chief Executive and the Electoral Services Team in discussion with officers of the Boundary Commission.
- 1.3 The review has had two stages – firstly to agree the overall size of the Council in terms of number of Councillors and then secondly how that number is distributed in terms of ward arrangements.

### **2. First Stage - Structure/Size of the Council**

- 2.1 Warwick District Council (WDC) currently operates a Leader/Executive/Scrutiny model. This followed a consultation exercise which showed no enthusiasm for an elected mayoral model. The consultation exercise, though it did not state it as an option, revealed no yearning desire for a return to the old committee system either.
- 2.2 In responding to the Boundary Commission about the size of the Council the following have been pertinent factors in the conclusion reached.
  - 1. The Council has been run on both the old committee system (1974 to 2001) and the Executive/Scrutiny model (2001 to present day). The later has demonstrably improved accountability and speed of decision making while reducing cost of support. The election of a Leader for 4 years, now gives even greater accountability and a sense of local leadership.
  - 2. In both of the above scenarios, the number of Councillors involved has been of the same order – 45/46. The Council wishes to remain inclusive and wants to retain the operation of Councillors from all walks of life, so does not want to move to Councillors being full time or close to that as that would exclude many people from considering the role.
  - 3. The WDC area covers a range of communities both rural and urban and it needs wards small enough for the Councillors to be able to relate to these various communities.
  - 4. The Council retains the wide range of services that usually are expected of shire district councils. It has no plans to stock transfer its housing stock or leisure provision but does have plans for a variety of service partnerships. It therefore needs a representative element

large enough to provide both Executive leadership and detailed scrutiny of a wide range of functions.

5. The Council has aspirations to improve the dialogue and scrutiny of housing especially as it moves into more partnerships for delivery by setting up a housing panel/committee; it is also to review its planning committee processes owing to the likelihood for facing a large number of significant development proposals.
6. Local leadership work has increased owing to a range of community issues to which Councillors need to respond– e.g. HS2; the creation of community forums; area grant budgets and this will increase further in the light of the provisions and expectations of the Localism Act.
7. Increasingly the role of the Executive requires more time for the appointed members and similarly of the scrutiny chairs and group lead members. This has to be balanced against the principle of Councillors not being full time.
8. The District has grown significantly and there are plans for further significant growth; this means that the level of representation if changed significantly now would be harmful in the future.

2.3 Consequently, the Working Party's consensus was that significantly reducing the number of Councillors would be damaging to the democratic and representative element of this Council without delivering any worthwhile benefits. Similarly there was no consensus to increase the numbers of Councillors from the present level. It would represent additional cost without any material benefit. A Council of the same or very similar size would assist the Council in fulfilling all of its activities in an economical and equitable manner.

2.4 The Boundary Commission to accept the Council's proposal to maintain the number of Councillors at 46.

### **3. Second Stage – Warding arrangements**

#### Issues

3.1 In addressing the second stage a number of current issues have to be taken into account:

1. That there should be within a plus or minus 10% deviation, equality in the average ratio of electors to Councillors across all wards. This is expected by the Boundary Commission but also by the electorate as it cannot be democratic that a small number of electors can elect some Councillors in some wards than in others. Currently, 7 of the Council's 20 wards are outside this 10% tolerance and Stoneleigh is currently more than 20% above the average.
2. Some distinct communities are split by current ward and parish boundaries making no sense to them, e.g. Warwick Gates, North West

corner of Milverton and New Cubbington/Lillington. Rural and urban communities should not be within the same ward if possible.

3. In Stoneleigh District ward, the University parish ward will shortly form the majority of the electorate and given this volatility through annual change makes for an uncertain democratic future for the resident community.

4. The proposed Warding arrangements need to take account of any realistic growth in the electorate over the next 5 years, in this case to 2017. This means the population forecasts are relevant as are planned developments.

5. The Local Plan, now at the preferred options stage, sets out significant proposals for growth which in some cases involve in effect, the creation of new communities and in others change significantly some existing communities. Whilst not that much of the proposed developments will occur within the period to 2016, it is important that the democratic representation of the area is established as early as possible to represent those new and changed existing communities and that it has some longevity. For example, where longer term development is anticipated in a ward area then a lower than average elector/councillor ratio gives headroom for such without causing a need for a further boundary review.

6. It is clear that over the years some parish boundaries have not changed to reflect various changes on the ground whether they be new roads or new housing areas and these need to be brought up to date. Where 100 or more electors are involved this can happen now, as parish wards can be created, but where a much smaller number of electors is involved this will have to be addressed by a separate but wider community governance review of parish/town boundaries by the District Council.

### Principles

3.2 The working party in developing the proposals agreed the following principles:

1. That wards should seek to reflect local communities as far as possible. So for example, avoiding a natural community area like Warwick Gates being split between 3 wards and 3 parishes/Town Councils;
2. That the size of the wards should aim to accommodate 2 Councillors per ward to help maintain a reasonable link between Councillors and their electorate, i.e. not make wards too big in electoral number terms;
3. That the range of average number of voters per councillor in each ward should be within plus or minus 10% of the overall average, so avoiding the huge range of disparity of average voters per Councillor that the current wards experience;

4. That the proposals take account of the forecast increase in the existing potential voter population;
5. Given no increase in the number of Councillors but an increase in the projected electorate, there will be an increase in the average ratio of electors/Councillor but this should be minimised;
6. That the proposals take reasonable account of only a limited planned developments that are likely to increase and distribution of the voter population within a 5 year period of now, but have regard to the location of the longer term proposals set out in the Preferred Options of the Local Plan and allow headroom for subsequent growth.

#### Projected Electorate Size

- 3.3 Appendix 1 shows the change in the size of the registered electorate in the District since 2000. Whilst somewhat erratic year to year, it shows a clear upward trend, growing from 93,932 in 2001 to 100,552 in 2011. The figure currently is 101,047 in 2012 (now used as the base year for this process). This mirrors the growth in the overall population over the past ten years or so.
- 3.4 The calculation of the electorate forecast was aided by work from Warwickshire Observatory using a forecasting tool POPGROUP. POPGROUP is software developed by EDGE analytics and the LGA to estimate current population and forecast future population. Past assumptions about births, fertility, deaths, mortality and migration are entered in order to generate the forecasts. It uses standard demographic methods to project forward using official ONS data at ward level. The range of officially sourced data incorporated into the model leads to the scope for application of the forecasts being both broad and reliable. See their website below: <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/popgroup/index.html>). The population projections can be seen as Appendix 2 for the District as a whole and for each current ward.
- 3.5 The Observatory provided WDC with POPGROUP ward level projections which were then applied by WDC to give electorate projections. The rates of change at ward level from POPGROUP (percentage change between POPGROUPs 2012 and 2016 18+ population) was applied to the 2012 Warwick District electorate population (from WDC electoral roll) to produce 2016 electorate projections.
- 3.6 However, the Working Party concluded that it should exclude all but 3 planned developments from these forecasts in order to minimise the risk of double counting. There is a specific reason for this in all 3 cases. The 3 cases are as follows:
  1. A development of 500 student bedrooms under construction and aimed at occupation this September. A ratio of 0.8 electorate per

bedroom was applied, generating 400 electors. It was felt that as this is part of the University and not a normal residential development and was of such a size that the forecasts would not be able to forecast it.

2. A planning application for 209 houses (using a ratio of 1.8 electors per house giving an electorate of 376) on land south of Campion School where the site lies in Whitnash town council area but vehicular access and community facilities likely to be used are within Sydenham. The site is separated from Whitnash by a railway line with only limited pathways linking the two areas. If agreed the site is likely to be developed within the 5 years and if not agreed now would then lie within Whitnash ward throwing its numbers out significantly but more importantly ignoring the principle the Working Party has sought, of linking wards more closely with communities.

3. Part of the proposed development in the Local Plan for a Garden Village on Land off Europa Way (200 houses using a ratio of 1.8 electors per house giving an electorate of 360). As this is effectively a new community or at least the beginning of one, the forecasts would not necessarily attribute any population growth to this area but it is important that as soon as possible appropriate democratic representation is in place as this will be likely to be an area for growth over a long period. The developer's intentions and evidence of work on site preparation (i.e. master plan work) demonstrate that if agreed the initial part of the site is deliverable within the 5 year period and so should form part of the forecast electorate.

- 3.7 The addition of these cases is minimal in overall electorate number terms. The consequence is that the forecast electorate come 2017 is 106,384, which amounts to 85.60321% of the 18 and over forecast population. Currently the 101,047 registered electorate is 85.57069% of the 2012, 18 and over population, a difference of less than 0.05%. The average ratio of electors to councillors as a consequence rises from 2,197 voters per Councillor to 2,313 per Councillor. This represents an increase of only 116 voters per Councillor, or just over 5%.
- 3.8 The impact of this projection on the current warding arrangements can be seen starkly in Appendix 3. This is the standard proforma that the Council has to complete for the Boundary Commission. It demonstrates that on the basis of the 2012 electorate 7 out of the current 20 wards are out of the plus/minus 10% tolerance, one by a very large amount. Looking forward this increases to 9 out of the 20 wards being out of tolerance, some by a significant amount. This information shows that the current warding arrangement of 11 three member wards, 4 two member wards and 5 one member wards does not work now, nor will it in the future.

- 3.9 In response the Working Party has developed a proposal shown in the map at Appendix 4 and shown in the Boundary Commission proforma at Appendix 5. This is based on 23 two member wards. Out of the 23 wards only 2 are out of tolerance now and only two would be out of tolerance in 2017. One of these is only just out of tolerance and the other is where we expect there to be future growth in the form of a new community – Myton Garden Village, so it has headroom for future growth without the need for a further boundary review.
- 3.10 The proposal addresses the issues in paragraph 3.1 and achieves the principles set out in paragraph 3.2.

*Description of proposals*

Rural Areas

- 3.11 The proposals for the rural areas are as follows:
1. Lapworth and Leek Wootton single member wards are merged to form a single two member ward Arden. There are no other changes to the boundaries but as Lapworth in terms of elector/councillor ratio is over the average ratio and Leek Wootton would be out of tolerance, they balance each other out. In terms of character and nature of area they are very much related.
  2. The Budbrooke, two member, ward remains unchanged.
  3. Burton Green Parish which has just been established as a separate parish is taken from Kenilworth Abbey which is town based whereas Burton Green is a rural area. Burton Green is added to Stoneleigh ward as is Bubbenhall village. This plus the growth of the University parish ward makes the Stoneleigh ward big enough to be a two member ward but it also means that the University element cannot become the majority element of the ward. The whole of this proposed ward is on the fringe of Coventry city and faces a variety of similar issues as a consequence.
  4. The existing Cubbington (two member ward) and Radford Semele (one member ward) wards are proposed to be merged into a two member Radford Semele and Cubbington ward. It is proposed to move the area of New Cubbington into Leamington Manor as it is in all fact and degree part of the same residential estate. Similarly the Blackdown and Old Milverton parish includes part of an estate that is largely part of Leamington Milverton. It is proposed therefore to move those areas from the existing Cubbington ward which also loses the parish of Bubbenhall to Stoneleigh. The existing Radford Semele ward falls outside the tolerance level elector numbers wise on its own but, if added with what remains of the existing Cubbington ward after the above deductions, is sufficiently

large to justify a two member ward covering villages along the River Leam valley to the east of Leamington.

5. Bishop's Tachbrook is currently a single member ward based around the village and a significant part of an urban housing estate – Warwick Gates. Taking the latter to form a whole urban ward with other constituent parts means that a ward based just on the village is not viable as the forecast electorate is only circa 1400 and does not have any realistic means to justify separate representation until and unless a proposal in the Local Plan for a development at Castle Park takes place – but this is much, much later, if indeed agreed. It is therefore proposed to merge the parish of Bishop's Tachbrook with the Myton area of Warwick, south of the River Avon which is proposed to be developed as a Garden Village, as a two member ward – Myton and Bishop's Tachbrook.

#### Whitnash and Heathcote

- 3.12 Whitnash is currently a 3 member ward and Heathcote, better known locally as Warwick Gates is a new large housing estate currently split between 3 District wards and 3 Parish/Town Councils. The latter clearly does not engender community focus or representation and from the public's point of view it makes things very unclear as to whom, or what represents them. The estate is quite distinct in the sense it is bound by 3 roads but functionally the community makes most use of the schools and other community facilities in Whitnash than Warwick or Bishop's Tachbrook. It is much closer. It is proposed to bring all of these elements together but in the context of the wider principle of setting up two member wards generally that 2 two member wards are established – Briars Hill and Heathcote. To maintain equity electoral number wise, the area to the east of the railway line and west of the Whitnash Brook down to where it meets the railway line is proposed to be transferred to Leamington Sydenham. A housing development is currently the subject of a planning application and if approved and developed it would make the Briars Hill ward out of tolerance.

#### Warwick

- 3.13 The 3 three member wards require radical change as two would be significantly outside the tolerance level if left alone. However, the transfer of the Warwick Gate area makes Warwick South unviable in any event as does allowing for the initial phase of the Myton Garden Village. The existing Myton area and the area of the proposed Garden Village are also proposed to be taken out of Warwick South. The proposal envisages 4 two member wards.

1. Woodloes lies as a distinct suburban community on the northern side of town with a smaller residential area north of the St Mary's Lands

green space. It is bounded by the A46 to the north and west, Coventry Road to the east and the Grand Union canal and St Mary's Lands to the south. It is just outside the tolerance level but there is no reasonable way that reflects the local community to balance the electoral numbers.

2. Emscote is a largely older, mixed residential lies to the north east corner of the town with the River Avon as its northern and eastern boundary, Coventry Road its western boundary and the Birmingham to London railway as its southern boundary.

3. Saltisford covers the town centre from the grand union canal to the north to the River Avon to the south and as far west as the roads leading round St Mary's Lands and to the Birmingham/London Railway line on the eastern side. Whilst diverse it covers the historic core of the town.

4. Aylesford covers the western part of the town from the town centre across the St Mary's Lands green space which is home to Warwick Racecourse, to the A46 and southwest wards to include the new and still expanding large housing estate of Chase Meadow and the more established Stratford Road residential area.

#### Kenilworth

- 3.14 The 3 three member wards are proposed to be changed to 4 two member wards – Abbey, Park Hill, Windy Arbour and St Johns. Two of the existing wards are below average and with the loss of Burton Green parish, Abbey becomes out of tolerance. As projected for 2017 so would St John's ward?

1. The town does not fall naturally into distinct neighbourhoods the way of other towns in the District, so making boundary changes more difficult to relate to local communities. In this case the town is effectively is divided into quarters with the Leamington/Coventry railway line and Warwick Road providing by and large the east/west divide and smaller suburban roads the north/south division as these are the nearest features to natural boundaries.

2. Whilst the proposed Windy Arbour ward is just on the cusp of being out of tolerance, it is the area of the town where significant housing growth is expected in the course of the Local Plan, so it does give headroom for expansion of electoral numbers. The other 3 proposed wards fall well within the tolerance levels.

#### Leamington

- 3.15 With the exception of Crown the existing Leamington wards are forecast to be within tolerance. However Crown, if unchanged would be 16% under the average. In addition, some communities have been sub divided



for a long time by out of date administrative boundaries. These include the New Cubbington area which to all purposes is part of Lillington on the north east side of Leamington and in the opposite corner of Leamington part of Old Milverton parish covers a housing estate which is accessed and forms part of a larger residential housing estate.

- 3.16 Consideration also needs to be given to accommodating a large planning application for 209 houses to be accessed/serviced via Sydenham area of the town but which is currently in Whitnash ward as do the longer term possibilities of proposals for larger residential developments to the north of the town.
- 3.17 Consequently, a more radical change has been proposed. This change creates 8 two member wards to take over from the existing 2 two and 4 three member wards. This brings all the wards within the 10% tolerance levels. It more realistically matches the wards to the differing neighbourhoods of the District's largest town and its historical development around a large river divide, regency period grid system and 20<sup>th</sup>/21st century peripheral expansion in various directions. So Crown retains but is slightly expanded, relates to a large peripheral council housing estate; Manor to a post war housing estate in Lillington, taking in New Cubbington area from Cubbington; Newbold to the mixed development along Kenilworth Road; Milverton to the cluster of Regency, Victorian and Twentieth century residential developments, including part of an estate currently in Blackdown and Old Milverton parish; Leam to the town centre and older period communities lining the largely the north side of the river Leam valley and parks; Willes to a largely 19<sup>th</sup> century early 20<sup>th</sup> century period terraced housing area between Willes Road and the River Leam; Brunswick to an Edwardian terraced housing area and an early post war council housing estate beyond the London/Birmingham railway line; and, Sydenham to a post 1960's housing estate with recent additions;

#### **4 Conclusion**

- 4.1 The proposals set out in this paper provide a clear justification for well balanced and community orientated pattern of democratic representation that will have longevity, at a time of the District is facing significant change and meet the Boundary Commission's statutory requirements.