

Further Electoral Review (F.E.R.) of North Wiltshire

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Boundary Committee of the Electoral Commission published its draft proposals for the warding of the District on 31 January 2006, and the Council is invited to submit comments on those draft proposals by 24 April 2006. (The Commission has indicated that it would be prepared to give the Council a few days grace as full Council falls on 25 April). The Boundary Review sub-committee and the Personnel, Licensing and Administration committee have considered the matter in detail, and have instructed officers to prepare this report for Council.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Council is recommended to advise the Electoral Commission that

- a) the opportunity to base the new District wards on the recognised County Community Areas has been missed,
- b) the present parish review is recommending a number of changes to parish boundaries, and
- c) the Council recommends amending the draft proposals in the following areas:

- 2.1.1 Calne Town Council (see appendix A)
- 2.1.2 Chippenham Town Council (see appendix B)
- 2.1.3 Lacock and parts of Corsham (see appendix C)
- 2.1.4 Biddestone (see appendix D)
- 2.1.5 Lyneham and Calne Without (see appendix E)
- 2.1.6 Malmesbury Town (see appendix F)
- 2.1.7 Minety and Purton ward (see appendix G)

3. Links to the Corporate Business Plan

- 3.1 No direct links, as the FER is externally handled, and was only notified to the Council during the course of the 2005/06 planning year.

4. General Background

- 4.1 The previous review of North Wiltshire was carried out in 1998/9 and implemented in the District and Parish elections of 2003. The Electoral Commission reviews the electoral arrangements of all councils, particularly where 30% or more of the wards deviate from the average number of electors per ward by plus or minus 10%. There are 38 wards in North Wiltshire and in the 2004 register 14 wards exceeded that tolerance, ranging from minus 10.89% to plus 26.79%. If the present ward arrangements are to continue unaltered, it is projected that in 2009 there will still be 14 wards out of balance, but ranging from minus 11.84% to plus 91.48%.
- 4.2 The Council, and a number of parishes, submitted proposals to the Boundary Committee, together with the supporting background information and electorate projections from the Wiltshire County Council demographics team for the period 2004 to 2009. These took into account infill and large building sites, together with average occupancy rates for the five County Communities.

- 4.3 The present draft proposals are the Electoral Commission's preferred arrangements, based on their consideration of all the views submitted, and are out for consultation until 24 April.

5 Further background

- 5.1 In making its proposals to the Commission in August 2005, the Council felt that that the new warding arrangements should aim to:

- result in a total council membership of 54 councillors
- introduce single member wards wherever possible, particularly in rural areas
- see each member representing between 1,750 and 2,140 electors, (i.e. within a tolerance of plus or minus 10% of the average of 1,945 per councillor)
- reflect the existing Community Areas. The Council's own Area Committee coverage should be slightly amended accordingly.
- recognise the separate needs of urban and rural communities.

- 5.2 The draft proposals do recommend 54 councillors, and consequently an average ratio of 1,750 to 2,140 electors per councillor based on the county's 2009 electorate projection.

- 5.3 The following table shows the position with regard to multi member wards

Description	Single member wards	Double member wards	Triple member wards	Total wards	Total councillors
Existing (2003)	24	13	1	38	53
Council's proposals*	46	4	0	50	54
EC draft proposals	18	12	4	34	54

* the Council's scheme did not break the urban areas into wards in view of the timescale for consultation. Instead it identified the overall areas and number of seats, and specified single member wards. In Wootton Bassett, although single member wards were preferred, an option was also suggested for maintaining the 3:2 split, with minor modifications.

- 5.4 The Council's proposal aligned itself very deliberately to the existing County Communities, which were used as the basis for the grouping of wards. This is separate from the formal county Divisions, but seems to have been totally disregarded by the Commission, thereby overlooking the fundamental basis of the local solution. District wards would have been clearly identifiable within each community area, and District councillors would not straddle community areas. The Council has a strong community area committee system, possibly to be enhanced shortly by the joint county / district / parish "Voice to Choice" scheme. John Chandler's book "A Sense of Belonging" contains a lot of interesting local history.

5.4.1 Many Wiltshire villagers identify with nearby towns which are not themselves in Wiltshire e.g. Swindon, Southampton, Bath and Bristol. As long ago as 1872, the Sanitary Areas in the North Wiltshire area were based on Chippenham, Calne, Malmesbury and Cricklade/Wootton Bassett. The Highway areas in 1864 were based on Chippenham, Calne, Malmesbury and Cricklade, with the part between Cricklade and Calne looking to Swindon. There was an attempt in 1878 to link the two sets of boundaries.

5.4.2 The secondary modern school catchment areas in 1946 were Corsham, Chippenham, Calne, Malmesbury, Wootton Bassett and Purton, and a composite map in the book clearly shows Chippenham, Malmesbury and Calne as “Spheres of Influence”, with the eastern side of the district looking towards Swindon. The boundary between Swindon’s area of influence and Malmesbury’s is distinctly along the western edges of Ashton Keynes, Leigh, Purton and Braydon.

- 5.5 It is only after an analysis of some 60 pages of countywide factors, that John Chandler examines the individual areas in detail. The strong conclusion is that the geological, commercial, religious and local government factors have given rise to the five distinct natural community areas in North Wiltshire of Malmesbury, Wootton Bassett, Chippenham, Corsham and Calne.
- 5.6 All Parish and Town Councils, and all District Councillors were invited to return a short questionnaire on the number of councillors, single / multi member wards and the principle of aligning wards to the Community Areas. A summary of the responses, sub divided into rural and urban areas, is appended at “H”.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no significant financial implications. The proposals recommend the addition of one councillor, from 53 to 54, which may result in a small increase to overheads.

7. Community & Environmental Implications

- 7.1 The purpose of the review is to achieve more equitable democratic representation, where all councillor to elector ratios fall within a tolerance of plus or minus 10% of the average. Currently the wards in North Wiltshire do not show such equality.

8. Equalities & Diversity Implications

- 8.1 As mentioned above, the purpose of the FER is to achieve better electoral equality. The draft proposals of the Electoral Commission include four triple member wards, including three in predominantly rural areas. The geographical distances and rural transport difficulties involved may well have equality and diversity implications.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 Although the implications of any changes to wards (and perhaps parishes in due course) will not occur until the May 2007 elections, preparatory work will have to be undertaken during the compilation of the 2007 register of electors. It is not anticipated that there will be a need for additional resources at this stage, although the new Electoral Administration Bill may well place a strain on resources at the end of 2006.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 The need to undertake FER’s is a statutory responsibility of the Electoral Commission. The council is not obliged to present any proposals to the Commission, or to comment on proposals, but it is felt that to do so would be in the best interests of the North Wiltshire electorate.

Documentation used in the preparation of this report:

- Correspondence from the Electoral Commission on the FER file held in the Policy and Democratic services section of Corporate Services
- Information available from the Electoral Commission relating to the PER of North Wiltshire
- “A Sense of Belonging – History, Community and the New Wiltshire” by John Chandler (ISBN 0-94878-93-9)

REPORT OF STRATEGIC MANAGER CORPORATE SERVICES TO COUNCIL - 25 April 2006

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Appendix A**Calne Town Council**

The recommendations from the Boundary Commission propose alterations to the Chilvester, Abberd and Priestley Wards to equalise numbers within those Wards, as well as increasing the members in Lickhill Ward and to propose that Lickhill Ward becomes a two member Ward. All other wards in Calne would remain single member Wards.

The Calne Town Council has made their own submission to the Commission, based on the existing wards, but suggesting changes to take account of population changes, particularly at Calne Lickhill and Calne Chilvester.

If Lickhill Ward were split into two, with one Councillor per Ward, this would give 1,876 electors per Councillor, well within the +/- 10% tolerances. The Council Members felt that an East/West split would respect community identities. Suggested names for the two new Wards were Lickhill for the Southern Ward and Beversbrook for the Northern Ward.

The Ward Boundary was proposed to be from Bremhill View up to Lickhill Road, North to the junction of School Road and St Dunstan Close, east following St Dunstan Close, to rear of Newcroft Road. From Newcroft Road around the natural boundary of existing houses to include Primrose Close, Duncan Street, Bluebell Grove and Cornflower Close as far as William Street. Both sides of William Street would be included within the proposed Lickhill Ward. From William Street the boundary would follow the line of Porte Marsh Road. This brings the proposed boundary line to join up with the Commission's proposals for a new Ward boundary between Abberd and Lickhill Wards, which the Town Council supports.

All the other boundary changes proposed by the Commission were acceptable to the Town Council, with the exception of the small area to the extreme east of Abberd Ward, proposed to move to Lickhill Ward. The Town Council believes this should remain in Abberd Ward as at present.

The Town, members felt that the extreme North Western Boundary proposed by the Commission has been taken too far into the Calne Without Parish. The Town Council has already proposed that the outer Parish boundary should follow the line of the by-pass, Beversbrook Road. Members felt that this should be the outer extent of Chilvester Ward (District Ward) thus following the Parish Boundary proposals and thereby causing less confusion for electors. The Electoral Commission's proposal takes the whole of the Calne Without Parish ward of Calne Without. A "neater" solution would be to redraw the boundary between Calne Without Parish ward and Middle ward to follow the line of the bypass (or rationalise the parish boundary to the line of the bypass).

Appendix B

Chippenham Town Council

The proposals for the Chippenham area show the present Cepen Park ward being merged east to west with Chippenham wards, rather than retaining its present north/south configuration. The Cepen Park South ward of Chippenham Without is brought into an increased Chippenham Allington ward, and the Cepen Park North ward of Langley Burrell is added to the Park ward.

The Town Council supports the principle of single member wards, and therefore feels the Cepen Park North ward should be represented separately from the Chippenham Park ward, i.e. both should be single member wards. (The Commission proposes a new Cepen Park Central ward of Chippenham Without parish, being the land which is in Chippenham Without to the north of the A420 within the line of the bypass)

Appendix C**Lacock and parts of Corsham**

The Council has previously stated that it wished to see single member wards wherever possible. In some areas this is not possible without arbitrarily splitting a parish without due regard to natural, geographical or physical factors on the ground.

A large triple member ward is shown at Corsham and Lacock, consisting of the parish of Lacock, and the Corsham, Neston and Gastard ward of Corsham parish. However, the smaller rural villages in the south of the proposed triple member ward have more in common with themselves than with the large urban population of Corsham ward. If Corsham were to become a double member ward (proposed 2009 electorate of 3856, i.e. a variance of less than 1% of the target) then the southern villages could easily become a single member rural ward.

District ward lines must follow either parish boundaries or parish ward boundaries. Lacock (821), Gastard (385) have a projected population of 1206, combined. Neston is shown as 1274 total, including the proposed Royal Arthur redevelopment, which does not currently have planning permission. If the ward boundary between Corsham Rudloe and Corsham Neston were to be redrawn, the logical point to do so and leave the Neston village intact is where Greenhill joins Moor Green. Anything south and east goes east, and north and west goes north. There are two logical breakpoints:

Neston split - 27 March 2006

Total parish at 2006 register level = 961

Total parish projected for 2009 = 1274

<u>Road</u>	<u>Electors (2006)</u>
Westwells	136
Westwells Road	7
	<hr/>
	143
Durley Park	27
Greenhills	85
Moor Green	68
Moor Park	55
Sheppards	21
Jaggards Lane	6
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	262
Total of both areas	405

If these 405 electors and the Royal Arthur (320) were moved into the proposed Box and Rudloe double member wards, the effect would be:

Single member ward Lacock (821), Gastard (385), Neston (549) = 1755 (5 above minimum of 1750 or 90.23%)

Double member ward of Box (2803), Rudloe (916), plus part of Neston (405), plus Royal Arthur (320) = 4444. This would be an average of 2222, which in theory is 82 above the maximum of 2140 (114.24%). However, the Royal Arthur site has not received planning permission, and is unlikely now to be fully developed, if at all, by 2009. The more likely figure is therefore Box (2803), Rudloe (916), plus part of Neston (405), = 4124. This would be two at 2062, which is 78 below the maximum tolerance (106.02%).

Appendix D**Biddestone**

Both the Council's proposal (August 2005) and the Electoral Commission's draft proposal (January 2006) show Biddestone joining with Corsham Pickwick to form a revised Pickwick ward. Biddestone is part of the Corsham Area Community, but currently sits within the Chippenham Area committee structure. Biddestone parish council feels very strongly that its affinities lie with the Bybrook villages of the proposed Yatton Keynell ward rather than the predominantly urban Pickwick ward of Corsham.

Local ward members have put forward the following reasons to include Biddestone with Yatton Keynell ward.

- Primary school children go to Yatton Keynell
- Secondary school children go mainly to Chippenham, not Corsham
- The PCC has links with, and shares clergy with, Yatton Keynell, rather than Corsham
- The parish council chairman regularly meets with the chairmen of other Bybrook valley parishes
- Local opinion does not support the inclusion of Biddestone with Pickwick

Biddestone had 385 electors at 1 December 2004, the base point for the electorate calculations, and this is also projected to be 385 at mid 2009 levels. If Biddestone does not go in with Pickwick, then its neighbouring (proposed) wards are Box and Rudloe, Colerne and Yatton Keynell. Of these, Yatton Keynell seems the most logical alternative to Pickwick. The proposed Yatton Keynell ward has a proposed electorate of 1847 in 2009, a variance of 98 (5%) from the average. From this, it can be seen that adding 385 electors to Yatton Keynell ward would bring the ward electorate up to 2232 (a variance of plus 14.7%). The maximum ward size, under the Commission's 10% tolerances would be 2140; the ward would have 92 too many electors.

Local members have put forward two measures to achieve better electoral equality with Biddestone moving to the Yatton Keynell ward:

- 1) at the eastern end of the proposed Yatton Keynell ward, transfer the Chippenham Without ward (146 electors) of the Chippenham Without parish to the proposed Kington Langley ward. This would reduce the Yatton Keynell electorate to 2086 (tolerance of plus 7%), and increase the proposed Kington Langley ward to 2151 (tolerance of plus 10.6%). Chippenham Without parish ward is currently in the Kington St Michael district ward along with Biddestone, Yatton Keynell and Kington St Michael.
- 2) Move approximately 150 electors from the Corsham and Lacock ward in to Pickwick ward. Without Biddestone, Pickwick ward in 2009 is projected to have 3064 electors – for a two member ward, Pickwick would need between 3501 and 4279 electors to be viable (3890 being the target figure). Pickwick would therefore need to acquire a minimum of 437 electors (target = 826, maximum = 1216), not 150.

These will be explored further before the meeting of Council on 25 April.

Appendix E**Lyneham and Calne Without**

The villages of Tockenham, Clyffe Pypard and Broad Town have always enjoyed a "triangular" relationship being on the edge of Wootton Bassett, and there is also limited interaction between Tockenham and Hilmarton, primarily by virtue of the fact that the church benefice covers these areas. Tockenham, Clyffe Pypard and Bushton look to Wootton Bassett, including for secondary education, as there is no direct transport link to Calne from these villages. Lyneham primarily looks to Wootton Bassett with some parts looking to Calne.

Density (or sparsity) of population is a real concern. On a practical note, it would be almost impossible for a non-car driver to represent the ward, as the only form of transport available would be taxi. This would be against the Equality and Diversity principles that we are trying to engender, not to mention sustainability. District Councillors try to attend Parish Council meetings within their ward and the very large rural ward proposed would make the task almost impossible.

Village communities generally look for representatives with strong local connections, and would not be happy being represented by somebody with no connection to the village, and would therefore feel under represented in a large, rural three member ward.

This proposal would cut across NWDC Community Areas, as well as Wiltshire County Council Wards. To put Lyneham with Calne would not be logical.

An alternative proposal, recommended to the Council, would be to look at the proposed Lyneham triple member ward and the Calne Without single member ward and arrive at a different permutation, grouping local connections better and achieving two single members wards in the more rural areas. Lyneham contains a number of absent electors, e.g. service proxy voters.

Alternative proposal for the Lyneham and Calne Without wards

Register	Polling District	2005 1-Dec-04	2006 1-Dec-05	Projected EC's draft ward Mid 2009	
NA1	TYTHERTON LUCAS WARD (BREM HILL)	103	103	102 Lyneham	
MG1	EAST TYTHERTON WARD (BREM HILL)	154	155	153 Lyneham	
MH1	FOXHAM WARD (BREM HILL)	202	198	201 Lyneham	
MF1	BREM HILL WARD (BREM HILL)	333	328	331 Lyneham	
NB1	PEW SHAM WARD (CALNE WITHOUT)	157	160	156 Lyneham	
MU1	WEST WARD (CALNE WITHOUT)	947	959	941 Calne Without	
MV1	SANDY LANE WARD (CALNE WITHOUT)	61	58	61 Calne Without	
				1,945	1 seat
OS1	LYNEHAM AND BRADENSTOKE (PART)	698	707	696 Lyneham	
OT1	LYNEHAM AND BRADENSTOKE (PART)	2507	2503	2,501 Lyneham	
NK1	CLYFFE PYPARD	259	244	283 Lyneham	
OC1	HILMARTON	621	612	617 Lyneham	
PT1	TOCKENHAM	179	183	179 Lyneham	
				4,276	2 seats
MS1	MIDDLE WARD (CALNE WITHOUT) (PART)	172	171	171 Calne Without	
MT1	MIDDLE WARD (CALNE WITHOUT) (PART)	82	87	81 Calne Without	
MQ1	EAST WARD (CALNE WITHOUT)	526	556	523 Calne Without	
MY1	CHERHILL WARD (CHERHILL)	485	490	482 Lyneham	
MZ1	YATESBURY WARD (CHERHILL)	102	111	101 Lyneham	
NM1	COMPTON BASSETT	215	210	214 Lyneham	
OB1	HEDDINGTON	331	350	359 Calne Without	
				1,931	1 seat

Appendix F**Malmesbury Town**

The Council's proposal to the Electoral Commission was for two single member wards within Malmesbury. The Commission's draft proposal is for a single dual member ward. If the Council wishes to restate its case for two single member wards, then it will need to demonstrate good reasons for the split, and also show the detail.

The number of electors in Malmesbury at 4 April 2004 is 3,708, and the total projected for mid 2009 was 4,088. This fits neatly within the Commissions range of 1945 electors per councillor, plus or minus 10% (i.e. 1,750 to 2,140). District wards must follow either parish boundaries or parish ward boundaries, so the key to achieving a solution for Malmesbury would be to define a suitable internal ward boundary. Work is in hand to rationalise the suggested boundary line based on the current OU1 and OV1 registers, and the local District councillors and Town Council have been asked for their views. The Council meeting on 25 April will be given an update on the latest position.

There has been a suggestion that the two wards should be known as a) Westport and b) Malmesbury Town and Filands. In order to avoid possible confusion with the Westport ward of St Paul Malmesbury Without parish, it is suggested that the St Paul Malmesbury Without parish ward be renamed Westport Without.

Appendix G**Minety and Purton**

The Commission's proposed Minety and Purton ward has two serious deficiencies when measured against the Council's own criteria. If the Commission is to be persuaded that there are local factors which should outweigh the electoral equality ("number crunching") issues, then the case will have to be backed up with evidence. The shortcomings when measured with the council's criteria are 1) a triple member ward in a predominantly rural area is geographically very large and it is time consuming to travel from one side to the other easily, and 2) the ward transcends existing Community Areas. In this particular case, the Community Area issue is more pronounced, in that Minety and Oaksey naturally look to Malmesbury, whereas from Ashton Keynes southwards, the natural gravitation is towards Swindon.

The extreme north east of the District lends itself naturally to a ward consisting of Marston Meysey, Latton and Cricklade, so the options for re-designing the Minety and Purton ward are limited.

Proposed 2009 electorate figures

Ashton Keynes	MA1	1,092
Braydon	PI2	43
Leigh	OM1	274
Minety	OX1	1,128
Oaksey	PD1	392
Purton (part)	PJ1	254
Purton (part)	PI1	2,991
TOTAL		6,173

The target ratio of electors to councillors is 1,945, with a tolerance of plus or minus 10%. This produces a range of between 1,750 and 2,140. The proposed ward is therefore at the higher end of the scale ($6,173 / 3 = 2,058$). It is worth noting that the April electorate for Purton of 3,266 already exceeds the county's estimate of 3,245 for 2009.

The proposed Cricklade ward (3,960) is already slightly in excess of the target figure of 3,890 for a double member ward, so the logical potential area to re-locate is the western end of the Minety and Purton ward. The proposed Brinkworth ward has a 2009 electorate of 3,669 (-6%), so in theory could accommodate up to 611 more electors before exceeding the 10% tolerance. However, Oaksey has no common boundary with the Brinkworth ward, and its neighbour, Hullavington and Crudwell is already 3% above the target. Moving Oaksey there would make that ward up to 2,401, i.e. above the 10% tolerance. Similarly, moving Minety to the Brinkworth ward would take that ward up to a variance of 23%.

A marginal improvement might be to include Leigh with the Cricklade ward, taking its electorate up to 4234, or 2117 electors per councillor, a variance of 9%. This would have the advantage of reducing the Minety and Purton ward to 5,899, resulting in an elector councillor ratio of 1,966 (a variance of just 1%, allowing for greater flexibility in the future in the light of the county figures). However, the disadvantage, apart from disrupting the Cricklade ward which seems historically to be quite sound, would be that the parish of Ashton Keynes then appears even more disjointed from the main centre of the ward's population. The Council's own proposal resulted in a variance of 19%, but did at least retain Community Area boundaries.

There does not therefore seem to be an immediately obvious alternative to the Commission's draft Minety and Purton ward.

Appendix H

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE ISSUED IN MARCH 2006								APPENDIX H
PARISHES	Responded	Number of councillors			Single or multi wards		Align to	Agree with
		More than 54	54	Fewer than 54	Single	Multi	Community Areas?	EC proposals?
Sub total (rural parishes)	33	0	27	4	30	3	27	11
As percentage of category	61.11%	0.00%	81.82%	12.12%	90.91%	9.09%	81.82%	33.33%
Sub total (urban parishes)	3	1	1	0	2	1	3	2
As percentage of category	60.00%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%	100.00%	66.67%
GRAND TOTAL	36	1	28	4	32	4	30	13
As percentage of response	61.02%	2.78%	77.78%	11.11%	88.89%	11.11%	83.33%	36.11%
COUNCILLORS	Responded	Number of councillors			Single or multi wards		Align to	Agree with
		More than 54	54	Fewer than 54	Single	Multi	Community Areas?	EC proposals?
Sub total (rural councillors)	16	0	13	2	15	1	14	6
As percentage of category	64.00%	0.00%	81.25%	12.50%	93.75%	6.25%	87.50%	37.50%
Sub total (urban councillors)	6	2	4	0	3	3	6	2
As percentage of category	21.43%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%	33.33%
GRAND TOTAL	22	2	17	2	18	4	20	8
As percentage of response	41.51%	9.09%	77.27%	9.09%	81.82%	18.18%	90.91%	36.36%
PARISHES AND COUNCILLORS COMBINED	Responded	Number of councillors			Single or multi wards		Align to	Agree with
		More than 54	54	Fewer than 54	Single	Multi	Community Areas?	EC proposals?
Sub total (rural parishes)	49	0	40	6	45	4	41	17
As percentage of category	62.03%	0.00%	81.63%	12.24%	91.84%	8.16%	83.67%	34.69%
Sub total (urban parishes)	9	3	5	0	5	4	9	4
As percentage of category	27.27%	33.33%	55.56%	0.00%	55.56%	44.44%	100.00%	44.44%
GRAND TOTAL	58	3	45	6	50	8	50	21
As percentage of response	51.79%	5.17%	77.59%	10.34%	86.21%	13.79%	86.21%	36.21%