

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you in my capacity as the district councillor for Great Amwell ward. I am also able to provide insights as a resident of Great Amwell civil parish for almost 25 years who attended primary school in the village and secondary school in Ware; a town councillor for Ware Chadwell and a former town councillor for Ware Christchurch; and a twice-former Mayor of Ware, current deputy leader and former leader of Ware Town Council. My observations below lead me to strongly support the Conservative Group on East Herts District Council's proposals for a 3-member Ware Priory and Amwell ward and a 1-member Stanstead ward.

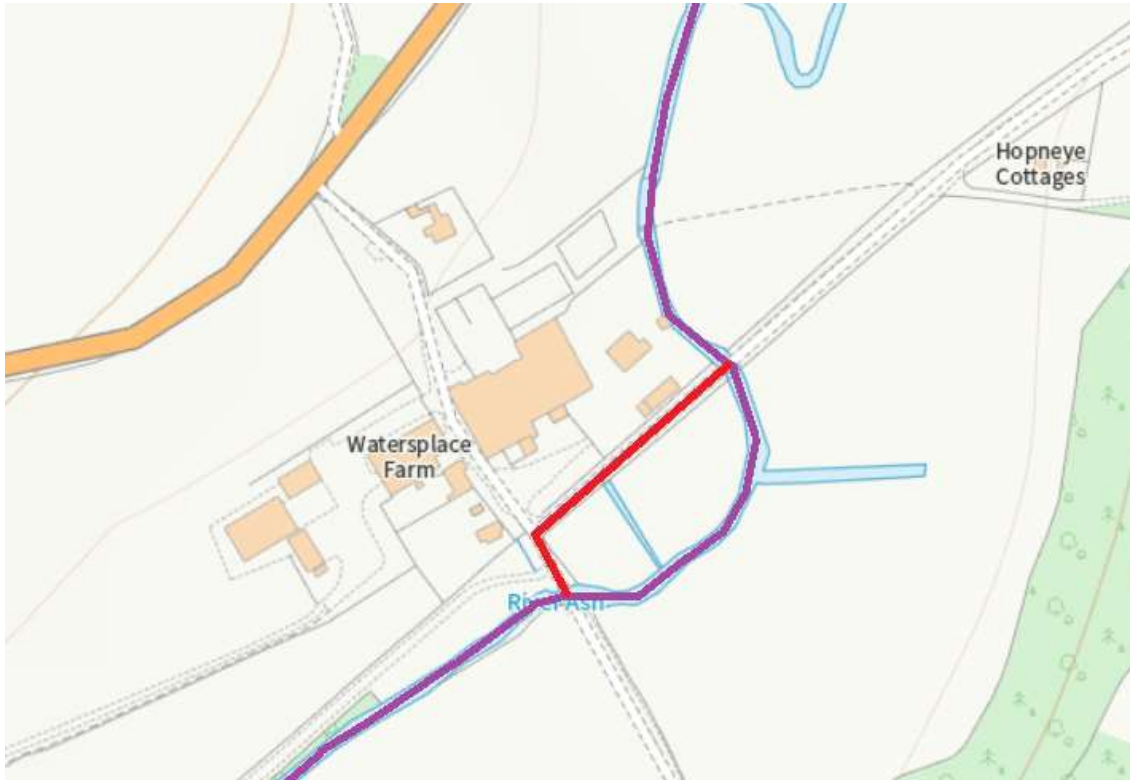
The current Great Amwell ward consists of two distinct communities, that of Great Amwell and that of the Hoddesdon-adjacent portion of Stanstead St. Margaret's civil parish included within the ward. Great Amwell civil parish is a historic and close-knit semi-rural community linked by the A1170 that looks northwards to Ware rather than southwards towards Hoddesdon. There are a range of Great Amwell-specific community groups, such as Amwell Rotary, the Amwell Society and Great Amwell Scout Group, amongst others. With only two pubs and a garden centre (Van Hage), there are no convenience shops in Great Amwell village. Residents look to Ware for key amenities, such as GP surgeries, pharmacy services and convenience good shopping. There is a church (St. John the Baptist) and primary school (again, St. John the Baptist), both of which are located in the core of the village.

Great Amwell contrasts significantly with both Stanstead Abbots and Stanstead St. Margaret's, two strongly Hoddesdon-facing villages that share a very limited community of interest with Great Amwell. Rye House, Rye Meads nature reserve and Rye Park Speedway are all located in Stanstead Abbots civil parish, emphasising the Hoddesdon-facing nature of that community. School choices also differ significantly between Great Amwell and Stanstead Abbots/Stanstead St. Margaret's, with Hoddesdon's John Warner School being a popular school choice in the latter villages, but not in the former. Stanstead Abbots and Stanstead St. Margaret's share a strong community of interest with each other, with their shared scout group (1<sup>st</sup> Stanstead Abbots and St. Margaret's) and village club (Stanstead Abbots and St. Margaret's Village Club).

Stanstead Abbots is highly built-up and townlike, to the extent that it is difficult to label it as a 'village' at all. Indeed, the range of amenities along the village's High Street (e.g. a dental practice, a GP surgery, numerous shops, a pharmacy, pubs, restaurants and a variety of employment sites) are more similar to those that you would find in a town than in a village. These amenities principally serve those living in the Stanstead Abbots and Stanstead St. Margaret's civil parishes, though users from Hunsdon and North Hoddesdon are not unknown. The character of the village is thus very different to that of the Group 2 (East Herts District Plan 2018) village of Great Amwell. The local issues in that village are very different to those in Great Amwell, a difference that will only increase in magnitude over the coming years given the development of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) adjacent to Stanstead Abbots in Eastwick, Gilston and Hunsdon parishes. Stanstead Abbots is also located in a different Hertfordshire County Council electoral division (Sawbridgeworth, which covers the entirety of the HGGT site) to Great Amwell (Ware South). Pairing Great Amwell civil parish with Stanstead Abbots civil parish in a single electoral ward would be a very serious mistake. The near-complete lack of community of interest between the two parishes would mean Amwell-specific issues risk being marginalised and forgotten, especially as construction commences on the HGGT site.

Given the village's strong orientation towards that town for the provision of services, there is a strong case for including Great Amwell civil parish with South Ware. Though South Ware is as urbanised as Stanstead Abbots, the shared community focal points of the New River, Post Wood, Presdales Pit, the River Lea and Tumbling Bay that span the parish boundary between Great Amwell and Ware, along with the importance of the A1170 to both areas, help create a significant shared community of interest. The fact that key Great Amwell community groups like Amwell Rotary (Hoe Lane) and Great Amwell Scout Group (London Road) are located in South Ware further demonstrates the deep links between Great Amwell and South Ware, and the ability of a ward that contains both areas to reflect the identities and interests of local communities. This fact is enhanced by the fact that Great Amwell civil parish used to cover all of the area of Ware civil parish south of the River Lea, and many key features of South Ware (e.g. Amwell End and Amwell House) have Amwell-influenced names from that time. The fact that I have simultaneously represented Great Amwell as a district councillor and South Ware as a town councillor (including serving as Mayor of Ware) despite having lived in Great Amwell for almost 25 years further demonstrates the shared identities and interests between the two areas, which exist even though Great Amwell is a distinct community in its own right. Great Amwell and South Ware are also located in the same county council electoral division, therefore a ward that crossed the Great Amwell/Ware parish boundary would help secure effective and convenient local government in a way that a Great Amwell/Stanstead Abbots ward would not.

If the LGBCE feels that Great Amwell parish should only be paired with a rural community, the obvious choice would be to pair it (together with the Stanstead St. Margaret's West parish ward currently located in Great Amwell ward) with Hertford Heath and Brickendon Liberty to form a 2-member ward. Hertford Heath, also known as Little Amwell, is of a far more similar character to Great Amwell than Stanstead Abbots. Given that the two Amwells were historically located in the same civil parish, there are significant links between the two villages in terms of identity. The two current wards (Great Amwell and Hertford Heath) are also located in the same county council electoral division, whilst the Hailey connection between the Hoddesdon-facing Stanstead St. Margaret's West parish ward and Hertford Heath civil parish is significant. However, although the case for pairing Great Amwell with Hertford Heath is significantly stronger than the case for pairing it with Stanstead Abbots, the case for pairing Great Amwell civil parish with South Ware is much stronger with regard to the LGBCE criteria. The excellent proposal for the Ware area put together by the Conservative Group on East Herts District Council provides a set of 5 wards (Stanstead, Ware Priory and Amwell, Ware Rural, Ware St. Mary's, Ware Trinity) that secure far higher equality of representation for Ware and its surrounding villages than any ward pairing the current Great Amwell ward with either the current Hertford Heath ward or the current Stanstead Abbots ward. Crucially, the Conservative Group's proposal enables Stanstead St. Margaret's civil parish, which is distinct in character from Great Amwell civil parish, to be united again in a single largely built-up district ward alongside other Hoddesdon-facing communities that face a different set of local issues to the Ware-facing communities to their north. Given that the Conservative Group's warding proposal for the Ware area secures equality of representation, reflects the identities and interests of local communities and secures effective and convenient local government to a far greater extent than any alternative that I can see, I very much recommend its incorporation into the initial proposals for the new ward boundaries for East Herts District Council. Having said this, it would be good to see the proposed ward boundary between Ware Rural and Ware Trinity amended slightly in the manner displayed below (i.e. the red line to replace the purple line at Watersplace Farm), to help provide another link between the components of the proposed Ware Rural ward. The road is a key access point from the B1004 for some of the housing in the Easneye area.



I hope that you take my observations into consideration when putting together your initial proposals for new electoral ward boundaries for East Herts District Council. It is crucial that the residents of both Great Amwell civil parish and St. Margaret's West parish ward are represented in electoral wards that secure equality of representation, reflect the identities and interests of local communities and secure effective and convenient local government, in line with LGBCE criteria.

Yours sincerely,

**Cllr. Alexander Curtis**

**East Hertfordshire District Councillor for Great Amwell**