

New electoral arrangements for Stevenage Borough Council Final Recommendations

November 2022

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A note on our mapping:

The maps shown in this report are for illustrative purposes only. Whilst best efforts have been made by our staff to ensure that the maps included in this report are representative of the boundaries described by the text, there may be slight variations between these maps and the large PDF map that accompanies this report, or the digital mapping supplied on our consultation portal. This is due to the way in which the final mapped products are produced. The reader should therefore refer to either the large PDF supplied with this report or the digital mapping for the true likeness of the boundaries intended. The boundaries as shown on either the large PDF map or the digital mapping should always appear identical.

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Introduction

Who we are and what we do

1 The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is an independent body set up by Parliament.¹ We are not part of government or any political party. We are accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. Our main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England.

2 The members of the Commission are:

- Professor Colin Mellors OBE (Chair)
- Andrew Scallan CBE (Deputy Chair)
- Susan Johnson OBE
- Peter Maddison QPM
- Amanda Nobbs OBE
- Steve Robinson
- Jolyon Jackson CBE (Chief Executive)

What is an electoral review?

3 An electoral review examines and proposes new electoral arrangements for a local authority. A local authority's electoral arrangements decide:

- How many councillors are needed.
- How many wards or electoral divisions there should be, where their boundaries are and what they should be called.
- How many councillors should represent each ward or division.

4 When carrying out an electoral review the Commission has three main considerations:

- Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents.
- Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity.
- Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government.

5 Our task is to strike the best balance between these three considerations when making our recommendations.

¹ Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

6 More detail regarding the powers that we have, as well as the further guidance and information about electoral reviews and review process in general, can be found on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Why Stevenage?

7 We are conducting a review of Stevenage Borough Council ('the Council') as its last review was completed in 1998, and we are required to review the electoral arrangements of every council in England 'from time to time'.² Additionally, some councillors currently represent many more or fewer electors than others. We describe this as 'electoral inequality'. Our aim is to create 'electoral equality', where the number of electors per councillor is as even as possible, ideally within 10% of being exactly equal.

8 This electoral review is being carried out to ensure that:

- The wards in Stevenage are in the best possible places to help the Council carry out its responsibilities effectively.
- The number of electors represented by each councillor is approximately the same across the borough.

Our proposals for Stevenage

9 Stevenage should be represented by 39 councillors, the same number as there are now.

10 Stevenage should have 13 wards, the same number as there are now.

11 The boundaries of all wards should change; none will stay the same.

12 We have now finalised our recommendations for electoral arrangements for Stevenage.

How will the recommendations affect you?

13 The recommendations will determine how many councillors will serve on the Council. They will also decide which ward you vote in, and which other communities are in that ward. Your ward name may also change.

14 Our recommendations cannot affect the external boundaries of the borough or result in changes to postcodes. They do not take into account parliamentary constituency boundaries. The recommendations will not have an effect on local

² Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 paragraph 56(1).

taxes, house prices, or car and house insurance premiums and we are not able to take into account any representations which are based on these issues.

Review timetable

15 We wrote to the Council to ask its views on the appropriate number of councillors for Stevenage. We then held two periods of consultation with the public on warding patterns for the borough. The submissions received during consultation have informed our final recommendations.

16 The review was conducted as follows:

Stage starts	Description
16 November 2021	Number of councillors decided
23 November 2021	Start of consultation seeking views on new wards
28 February 2022	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming draft recommendations
31 May 2022	Publication of draft recommendations; start of second consultation
8 August 2022	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming final recommendations
1 November 2022	Publication of final recommendations

Analysis and final recommendations

17 Legislation³ states that our recommendations should not be based only on how many electors⁴ there are now, but also on how many there are likely to be in the five years after the publication of our final recommendations. We must also try to recommend strong, clearly identifiable boundaries for our wards.

18 In reality, we are unlikely to be able to create wards with exactly the same number of electors in each; we have to be flexible. However, we try to keep the number of electors represented by each councillor as close to the average for the council as possible.

19 We work out the average number of electors per councillor for each individual local authority by dividing the electorate by the number of councillors, as shown on the table below.

	2021	2027
Electorate of Stevenage	65,317	70,467
Number of councillors	39	39
Average number of electors per councillor	1,675	1,807

20 When the number of electors per councillor in a ward is within 10% of the average for the authority, we refer to the ward as having 'good electoral equality'. All of our proposed wards for Stevenage are forecast to have good electoral equality by 2027.

Submissions received

21 See Appendix C for details of the submissions received. All submissions may be viewed on our website at www.lgbce.org.uk

Electorate figures

22 At the start of the review, the Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2027, a period five years on from the scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2022. These forecasts were broken down to polling district level and predicted an increase in the electorate of around 8% by 2027. We considered the information provided by the Council and were satisfied that the projected figures were the best available at the time.

³ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

⁴ Electors refers to the number of people registered to vote, not the whole adult population.

23 In August 2022, the Labour Party submitted a supplementary representation following a decision by the Secretary of State to approve the building of 576 dwellings in the Old Town area. It was concerned that the Council's forecast did not take any additional electors from this development into account. Councillor Brown also expressed similar concerns.

24 We are aware that forecasts may change over time because the planning process is dynamic and does not stop. There will always be a number of other factors that can affect whether forecast developments take place at the rate anticipated. However, we cannot restart our reviews each time a new development is approved. We take the view and make it clear at the start of reviews that once we have agreed a forecast with the Council, this will form the basis of the review.

25 Accordingly, we have used the Council's forecast figures to produce our final recommendations.

Number of councillors

26 Stevenage Borough Council currently has 39 councillors. We looked at evidence provided by the Council and concluded that keeping this number the same would ensure the Council could carry out its roles and responsibilities effectively.

27 We therefore invited proposals for new patterns of wards that would be represented by 39 councillors. As Stevenage Borough Council elects by thirds (meaning it has elections in three out of every four years), there is a presumption in legislation⁵ that the Council have a uniform pattern of three-councillor wards. We will only move away from this pattern of wards should we receive compelling evidence during consultation that an alternative pattern of wards will better reflect our statutory criteria.

28 We did not receive any submissions about the number of councillors in response to our consultation on ward patterns. Our draft recommendations were therefore based on a 39-councillor council.

29 We did not receive any submission proposing a different number of councillors for Stevenage in response to our consultation on our draft recommendations. We have therefore maintained 39 councillors for our final recommendations.

Ward boundaries consultation

30 We received 24 submissions in response to our consultation on ward boundaries. These included three borough-wide proposals from the Council's

⁵ Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development & Construction Act 2009 paragraph 2(3)(d) and paragraph 2(5)(c)

Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat groups. The remainder of the submissions provided localised comments for warding arrangements in particular areas of the borough.

31 The three borough-wide proposals each provided a uniform pattern of three-councillor wards for Stevenage. We carefully considered the proposals received and were of the view that all of the proposed patterns of wards resulted in good levels of electoral equality in most areas of the authority and generally used clearly identifiable boundaries.

32 Our draft recommendations were for 13 three-councillor wards. They were based on the Labour and Liberal Democrat groups' proposals. These proposals were broadly similar to each other. We decided to base our draft recommendations on a combination of these schemes because we considered that their proposals to the east of the town centre would provide a better reflection of the community identity and because it would avoid creating wards with disparate communities in other areas of the borough too. Having taken this decision, we generally proposed wards similar to their proposals throughout the borough.

33 Our draft recommendations also took into account local evidence that we received, which provided further evidence of community links and locally recognised boundaries. In some areas we considered that the proposals did not provide for the best balance between our statutory criteria and so we identified alternative boundaries.

34 We conducted a detailed virtual tour of Stevenage. This helped clarify issues raised in submission and assisted in the construction of the proposed boundary recommendations.

35 We considered that our draft recommendations would provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we received such evidence during consultation.

Draft recommendations consultation

36 We received 99 submissions during consultation on our draft recommendations. These included borough-wide comments from the Stevenage Constituency Labour Party on behalf of the Stevenage Council Labour Group ('Stevenage Labour Party') and Stevenage Liberal Democrats. The majority of the other submissions focused on specific areas, particularly our proposals in Longmeadow, Old Town, Pin Green and Woodfield wards.

37 The borough-wide comments were broadly supportive of our draft recommendations. However, both parties objected to the inclusion of several roads

in Chells ward instead of Manor ward. The Labour Party also proposed an alternative boundary in the city centre between Bedwell and Roebuck wards and modifications to Woodfield ward for electoral equality reasons.

38 Councillors Facey, Farquharson and Mitchell of Longmeadow ward proposed changes between Longmeadow ward and Shephall ward. Many residents of the current Old Town ward objected to being included in a neighbouring ward.

39 The Liberal Democrats proposed alternative names for a number of wards.

40 Our final recommendations are based on the draft recommendations with modifications and some consequential changes to Chells, Longmeadow, Manor, Old Town, Pin Green, Shephall, St Nicholas and Woodfield. We also make a minor modification between Old Town and Symonds Green. We rename Bandley Hill ward, Bandley Hill & Poplars and we have renamed Pin Green ward, Almond Hill.

Final recommendations

41 Our final recommendations are for 13 three-councillor wards. We consider that our final recommendations will provide for good electoral equality while reflecting community identities and interests where we received such evidence during consultation.

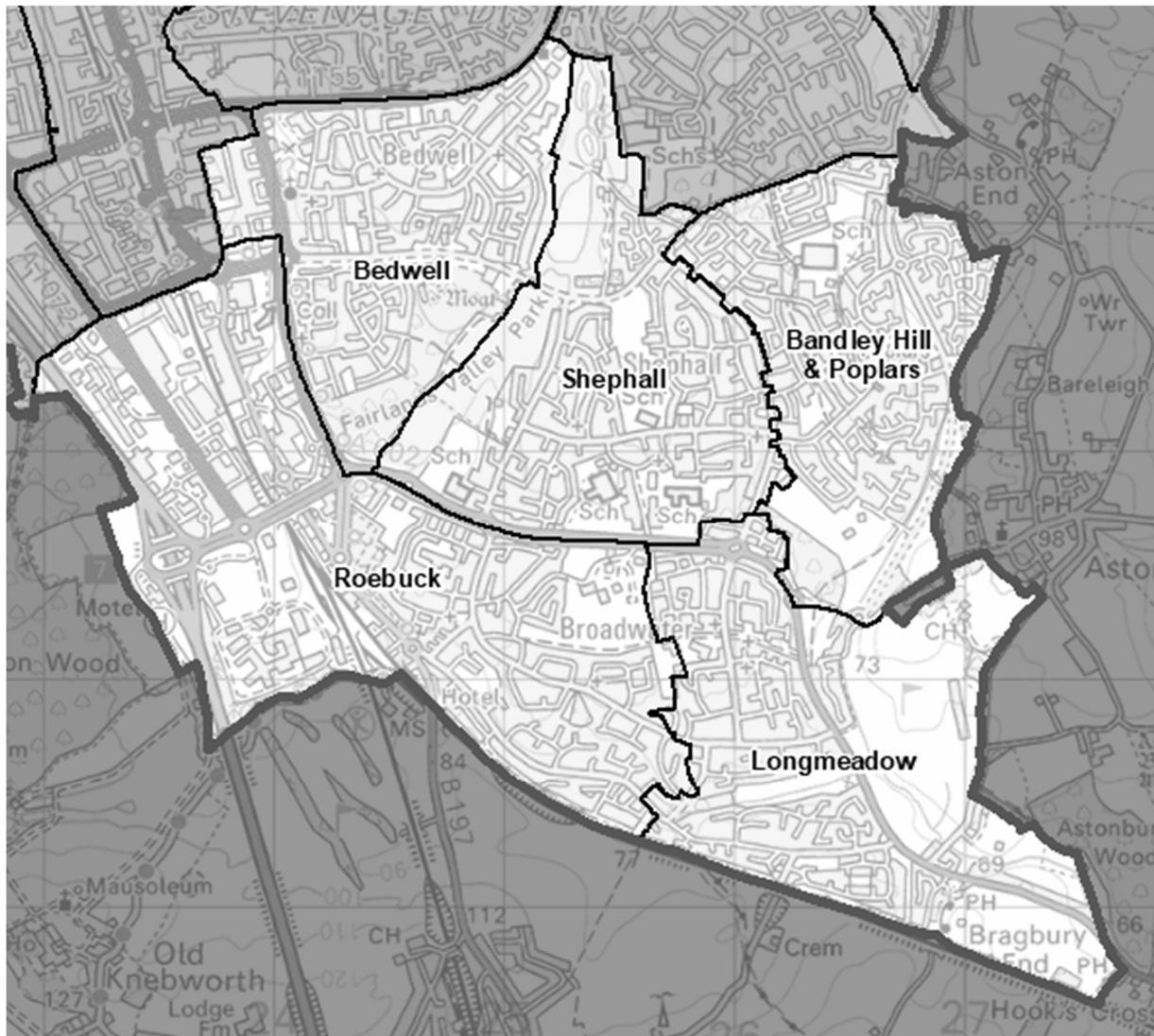
42 The tables and maps on pages 9–21 detail our final recommendations for each area of Stevenage. They detail how the proposed warding arrangements reflect the three statutory⁶ criteria of:

- Equality of representation.
- Reflecting community interests and identities.
- Providing for effective and convenient local government.

43 A summary of our proposed new wards is set out in the table starting on page 29 and on the large map accompanying this report.

⁶ Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Bandley Hill & Poplars, Bedwell, Longmeadow, Roebuck and Shephall



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Bandley Hill & Poplars	3	3%
Bedwell	3	9%
Longmeadow	3	-5%
Roebuck	3	3%
Shephall	3	-9%

Bandley Hill & Poplars

44 In response to our draft recommendations Bandley Hill ward, we received submissions from the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, the Longmeadow ward councillors and some residents.

45 The Labour Party supported our draft recommendations in this area and therefore did not propose any changes. The Liberal Democrats did not object to our

draft recommendations; however, they did suggest that we could make consequential changes to Bandle Hill ward by excluding the Barham Road and Marlborough Road area to balance out changes they were advocating between Chells and Manor wards.

46 With regards to this proposal to include Barham and Marlborough roads in Chells to the north, we note that in response to our initial consultation, the Liberal Democrats advocated including these roads in Bandle Hill to the south because of the 'significant natural barrier' that Six Hills Way represented. We also note that this proposed modification was not for community identity evidence reasons, nor would it create a stronger boundary.

47 Therefore, considering the submissions we received over the two consultations and the support for the identifiable boundary along Six Hills Way, we have not been persuaded to change our draft recommendations in this area. We therefore confirm the boundaries of our draft recommendations for this ward as final.

48 The Liberal Democrats proposed renaming this ward Bandle Hill & Poplars. We note that at the warding pattern stage we received a representation to create a Poplars ward comprising the Poplars neighbourhood within this ward. We are therefore content that a significant enough section of this ward will identify as living in Poplars. As a result, we have been persuaded to rename the ward accordingly.

Longmeadow and Shephall

49 In response to our draft recommendations, we received submissions from the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, the Longmeadow ward councillors and some residents.

50 The Labour Party and Liberal Democrats supported our recommendations for these wards, but the Longmeadow ward councillors did not.

51 Our draft recommendations placed Glenwood Close, Oakwood Close and Taywood Close in Shephall ward, north of the A602. Because we had representation which advocated placing them in Longmeadow ward to the south, in our draft recommendations report we asked for more evidence to support this alternative proposal.

52 In their response, Councillors Facey, Farquharson and Mitchell of Longmeadow ward expressed the view that residents of these roads looked to Longmeadow in the south. They indicated that the roads were approximately 150 metres closer to the shops in Oaks Cross in Longmeadow than those in The Hyde in Shephall. They also stated that Loves Wood and Ridlins Wood were natural boundaries between residents of these roads and the rest of the existing Shephall ward to the north. Furthermore, they pointed to the cycling and walking access between them and the

area to the south via Broadhall Way (A602) as further evidence to support the inclusion of these roads in Longmeadow ward.

53 We carefully considered this further evidence. While we consider the A602 a strong and identifiable boundary, we note that the woods are also identifiable as a boundary. We also recognise that residents are just as likely to use the Oaks Cross shops to the south as they are to use those in The Hyde to the north. We are satisfied that there is adequate access between this area and the rest of Longmeadow ward and note that the A602 is crossed elsewhere in Longmeadow ward. Therefore, we are content to modify our draft recommendations for these wards in line with the proposals from the Longmeadow councillors.

54 Longmeadow and Shephall wards are forecast to have 5% and 9% fewer electors, respectively, than the average for the borough by 2027.

55 A resident proposed that Shephall should not extend as far north as the Millennium Lake. Instead, they suggested that the lake be included in Bedwell or Chells ward. We noted this proposal. However, we consider that keeping both the Main and Millennium lakes in a single ward would facilitate effective and convenient local government. In addition, the boundaries we adopted around the lakes are coterminous with the county division boundary which tie it to ground detail. We are content that this is a good balance of our statutory criteria and have not been persuaded to make any modifications to this boundary.

56 Another resident stated that they would have to change the address on their business advertising banners from Broadwater to Roebuck. We assume that the business in question is in the Broadwater area of the borough, which appears split across Longmeadow and Roebuck wards. Although our draft recommendations move the boundary between these wards slightly to the west, the area is still split across the two wards. In any case, changing the ward does not mean that we are changing where the area known as Broadwater is.

57 The Liberal Democrats proposed renaming Longmeadow ward, Longmeadow & Bragbury. They proposed renaming Shephall ward as Peartree ward. They did not provide any evidence to support the suggested change to the Longmeadow ward name and we have not adopted the proposed name. With regards to Shephall ward, they state that 'it now simply does not cover the original Shephall geographical area'. Without additional evidence, we are unable to determine if residents identify as living in Peartree or in any of the alternative names suggested during the earlier consultation. We have therefore retained the existing ward name.

Bedwell and Roebuck

58 In addition to borough-wide comments from the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats, we received submissions from residents.

59 The Liberal Democrats were content with our draft recommendations for this area while the Labour Party expressed concern that a 9% variance could potentially speed up the need for a future review if the population growth exceeded the forecast. To mitigate this, it proposed that the boundary between the two wards in the city centre be moved further north from Southgate to run east to west along Market Square, and across Queensway. It was of the view that much of the affected area will be made up of new developments, so the community identity of the residents was yet to be established.

60 We carefully considered the Labour Party proposal and understand the desire to improve the electoral variance of Bedwell ward. However, we note that the proposed boundary splits adjacent neighbours in Queensway across wards in an unsatisfactory way. It also appears to split a proposed housing development across different wards. We sought, but could not find, a suitable alternative boundary within the town centre that would tie it to some ground detail. Accordingly, we have not adopted the proposal or modified our draft recommendations in this area.

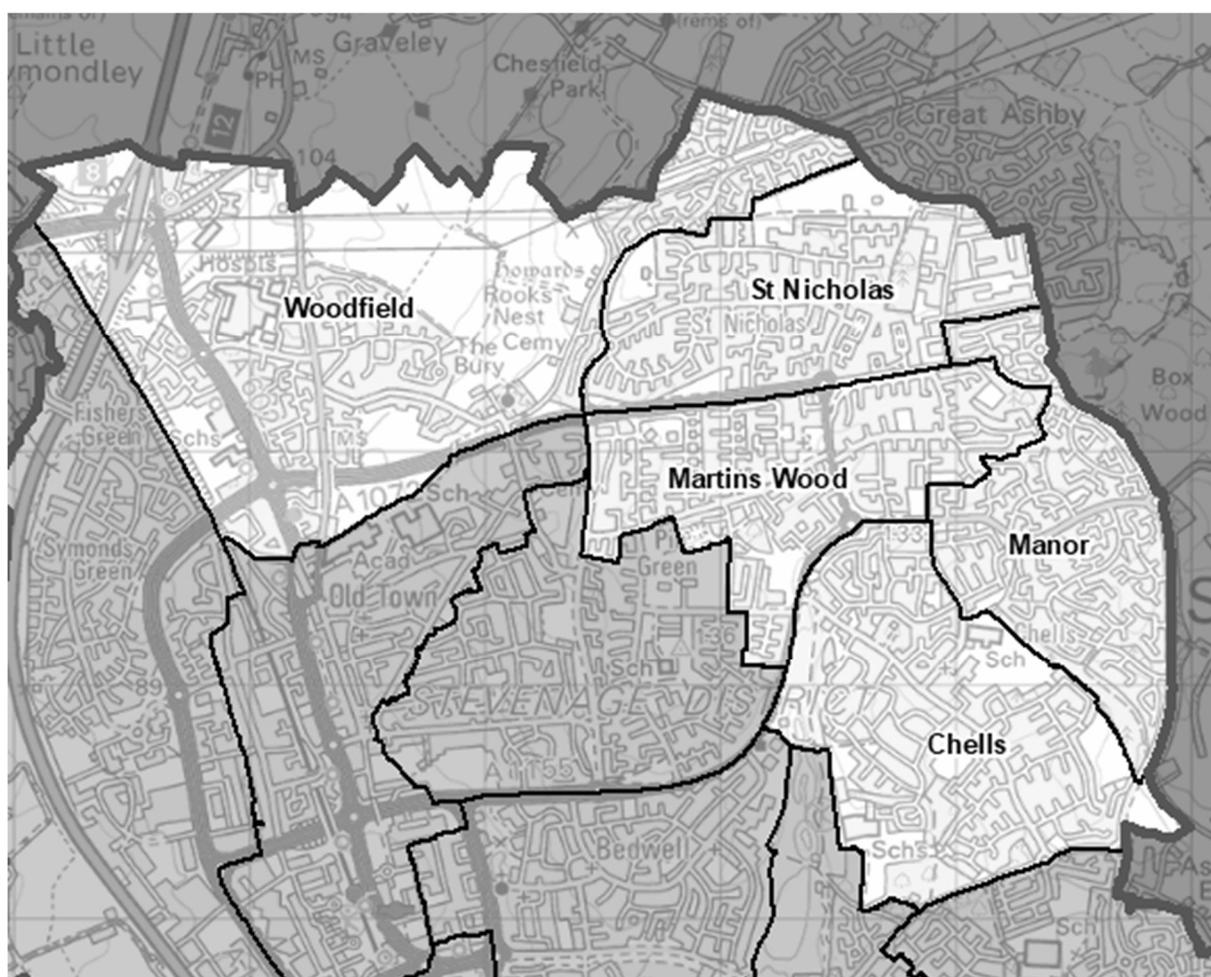
61 A resident was of the view that Colestrete and Shephall View are at the heart of Bedwell ward and should therefore be retained in that ward. Another resident was also concerned that Bedwell Crescent was excluded from this ward. We can confirm that our draft recommendations for Bedwell ward included the three streets in question, on community identity grounds.

62 One resident was concerned that Bedwell was losing green space to Shephall ward. However, we note that while some green space has been included in Shephall ward, Magpie Corner Wood, Millennium Wood, Monk's Wood and Whomerley Wood remain within Bedwall ward.

63 A resident expressed concern that our draft recommendations split Norton Green between Roebuck and Symonds Green wards. We have retained the existing boundary in this area and, as far as we can tell, have not split Norton Green by including any of it in Roebuck ward.

64 We did not receive any other proposals relating to this area and we therefore confirm our draft recommendations for Bedwell and Roebuck wards as final.

Chells, Manor, Martins Wood, St Nicholas and Woodfield



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Chells	3	2%
Manor	3	2%
Martins Wood	3	-4%
St Nicholas	3	-1%
Woodfield	3	-10%

Chells and Manor

65 We received comments from some residents in addition to the borough-wide comments from the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats.

66 Both the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats advocated for the use of Mobbsbury Way as the boundary between these wards, which would place certain residents to the east of this road in Manor ward. They pointed to the improvement in electoral equality that this boundary would produce. In addition, the Liberal Democrats expressed the view that these residents of Burns Close, Byron Close, Dryden Crescent, Keats Close, Marlowe Close, Shirley Close and 42-112 (even

numbers) Mobbsbury Way have links with the area to the east. They cited two well-used footpaths via Narrowbox Lane as evidence of community links and access. They also stated that these residents looked more to Emperors Gate facilities than those at The Glebe in Chells ward.

67 One resident objected to the 'increase in Chells ward' at 'the expense of Manor ward'. They felt that it would be difficult for Chells ward councillors to maintain the current level of service and support to residents. Another resident suggested that we exclude the area north of Martin's Wood from Manor ward because it seemed cut off from the rest of the ward. On the other hand, a resident of the area in question expressed support for our draft recommendations.

68 A resident of the Pacatian Way area also expressed support at being included in Manor ward stating that they 'had always considered themselves part of Chells Manor' and not Martins Wood.

69 In the draft recommendations report, we invited comments and further evidence to support either our initial recommendations or the Mobbsbury Way boundary proposed by the two political groups. We have carefully considered the additional community evidence provided by the Liberal Democrats in response to those recommendations. We note that while there will be some community links across Mobbsbury Way, the area in question appears to be a discrete area which also has community links and uses facilities to its east. Therefore, we have been persuaded to modify our draft recommendations for community identity reasons, and include these residents in Manor ward. We note that this also improves the electoral variance of both wards.

70 The boundary between the two wards runs along the northern section of Mobbsbury Way and then along the eastern perimeter of The Nobel School and Lodge Farm Primary School, in line with revised boundaries submitted by the Labour Party. We are content that this is a good balance of our statutory criteria.

71 Chells and Manor wards are both forecast to have 2% more electors than the average for Stevenage by 2027.

St Nicholas and Woodfield

72 In addition to the borough-wide comments, we received submissions from some residents.

73 The Liberal Democrats supported our draft recommendations for these wards in full. The Labour Party expressed broad support but proposed two modifications. Firstly, it advocated that Guildford Close be included in St Nicholas ward because in its view Great Ashby Way was a natural boundary between Guildford Close and 'greater St Nicholas' on one hand, and the area to the west on the other. It also

pointed to the pedestrian link between Guildford Close and Iona Close which we included in St Nicholas ward. A resident expressed a similar view pointing to the close proximity of the two streets to one another and stated that both looked to St Nicholas for their amenities.

74 Secondly, the Labour Party proposed that Trafford Close and Trent Close (Old Town) and the Todd's Green area (Symonds Green) be included in Woodfield ward, for electoral equality reasons. In the case of the Todd's Green area, it was of the view that these residents shared no community with Symonds Green but that 'the properties' shared more in common with the older properties in Woodfield.

75 Five residents objected to the inclusion of the area north of Julian's Road in Woodfield. They were of the view that due to the ages of the properties and proximity to the High Street in Old Town, this area should be included in Old Town to the south. Including these residents in Old Town would leave Woodfield with at least 14% fewer electors than the average for Stevenage. We do not consider this high level of electoral imbalance is justified by the community identity evidence and we have not been persuaded to change our draft recommendations in line with these comments.

76 One resident argued for the use of Julian's Road as a boundary to keep the conservation area in a single ward. Another resident pointed out that our draft recommendations had split their property across wards. We note that adopting Julian's Road as a boundary would address this latter issue and we have therefore adopted this change.

77 A resident advocated for all of Great Ashby to be included in St Nicholas ward and not Woodfield, on community identity grounds. We note that if we included the area north and east of St Andrews Drive in St Nicholas ward, this would produce a ward forecast to have 28% more electors than the average for Stevenage by 2027. Therefore, we did not adopt this proposal.

78 We considered the comments we received about Guildford Close. We note that most respondents, including the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, Councillor Parris and residents proposed its inclusion in St Nicholas ward at the warding pattern consultation stage, on community identity grounds. We have therefore been persuaded that residents of both Guildford and Iona Close are part of the same community and look east towards St Nicholas and we have included them in this ward as part of our final recommendations.

79 However, we have not been persuaded to include Trafford Close and Trent Close in Woodfield ward. In creating wards, we seek to balance our three statutory criteria. With an electoral variance of -10%, we consider Woodfield ward has an acceptable level of electoral equality. Therefore, we are content to include these

residents in a ward south of the A1072 where we understand their community lies. While we have included residents south of the A1072 in Woodfield further west, we consider that that area north of Julian's Road has better crossings to unite the community in that area.

80 We have also not been persuaded that Todd's Green residents share a strong community identity with Woodfield residents. We note that Todd's Green is at the edge of the borough. We consider that its residents are closer to Symonds Green residents than those in Woodfield (see paragraph 103).

81 The Liberal Democrats proposed renaming Woodfield ward, Coreys Mill ward. They expressed the view that Woodfield was 'an invented name with no obvious local connection'. However, they did not provide any evidence that residents of this ward would identify with the proposed name or with any of the alternative names they proposed during the warding stage consultation. Therefore, we did not change the name of the ward.

82 St Nicholas and Woodfield wards are forecast to have 1% and 10% fewer electors than the average for Stevenage, by 2027.

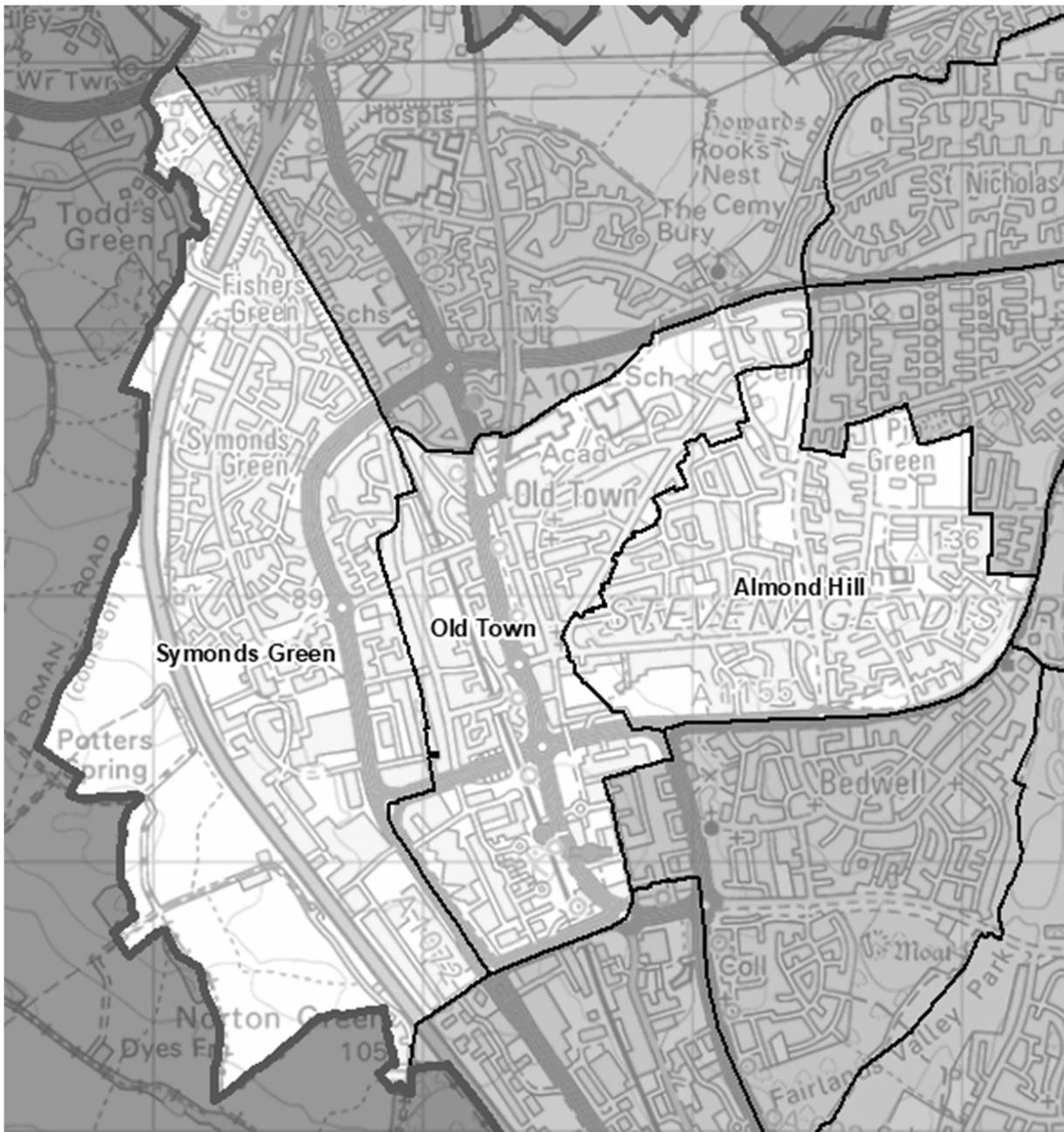
Martins Wood

83 Both borough-wide comments supported our draft recommendations for Martins Wood. We did not receive any specific comments about the boundaries of this ward except for those who expressed support at being included in neighbouring wards instead of this ward.

84 We are therefore confirming our draft recommendations for Martins Wood ward as final.

85 The Liberal Democrats proposed renaming this ward The Oval or Hampson ward. They did not provide any reason or evidence for suggesting The Oval and, although we note the existence of The Oval Community Centre within the ward boundaries, we have no way of determining if residents identify as living in The Oval. The Liberal Democrats note in their submission that they suggest naming the ward Hampson 'after Hampson Park which is in the Pin Green geographical area'. However, we do not consider this is persuasive evidence to rename this ward. Therefore, we have not renamed the ward.

Almond Hill, Old Town and Symonds Green



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2027
Almond Hill	3	2%
Old Town	3	6%
Symonds Green	3	2%

Almond Hill and Old Town

86 Most of the submissions we received were about our draft recommendations for Old Town and Pin Green wards.

87 The Liberal Democrats supported our draft recommendations for this area in full. The Labour Party expressed support for Pin Green ward but proposed that we moved Trafford Close and Trent Close from Old Town to Woodfield ward to improve the electoral variance of the latter. We explain why we have not adopted this change in paragraph 79.

88 The residents who wrote to us objected to the area east of Letchmore Road, west of Grace Way and north of Sish Lane being included in Pin Green ward. Some expressed concern that this would devalue their properties while others felt that they would no longer have access to services in Old Town. Some residents described their proximity to the High Street in Old Town. Most of them pointed to the historical existence of this area of the borough and stated that they identified as living in Old Town and requested that we reinstate the existing boundaries of the ward. One resident was of the view that if it was not possible to do this, we should include at least Alleyns Road and if possible Hellards Road in Old Town. Two residents queried the boundary that ran along a section of Walkern Road as it placed some residents of Walkern Road in different wards.

89 We considered all these comments carefully. The existing Old Town ward is forecast to have 23% more electors than the average for Stevenage in 2027. We note that even with the changes that we have made to the north of the ward, retaining the existing boundary in the south along Fairlands Way would produce a ward forecast to have 16% more electors than the average for the borough. We are not minded to create wards with such poor electoral equality which is why we are changing the boundaries of the existing ward. We note that the scale of development in the city centre means that there will also be a knock-on effect on neighbouring wards like Old Town. While we recognise the strength of feeling and community identity regarding the Old Town area, a ward based broadly on the existing ward would have very poor levels of electoral equality which we do not consider are acceptable. Accordingly, we are not proposing to move substantially away from our draft recommendations in this area.

90 Nevertheless, we looked to see if there were alternative boundaries we could adopt within the area that might go some way in addressing the concerns raised. For example, we considered whether we could include some additional roads to the east of Letchmore Road in the Old Town ward. However, because this is a densely built-up area of the borough, this would involve splitting roads across wards in an unsatisfactory way which we were not persuaded would facilitate effective and convenient local government. We considered that uniting Letchmore Road residents in a single ward provided the most identifiable boundary and clarity for residents in the area. Therefore, we did not make any changes to the boundary east of Letchmore Road.

91 With regards to Walkern Road we are content to unite the residents in a single ward. Accordingly, we have now included 102–132 (even numbers) Walkern Road in Old Town ward.

92 With regards to house prices and local services, as mentioned in paragraph 14, our recommendations do not have any effect on house prices. Furthermore, we are not aware that there is any correlation between electoral wards and services like GP surgeries and school catchment areas. Therefore, we have not been persuaded to change our draft recommendations because of these representations.

93 We note that our draft recommendations were based on boundaries that were locally proposed to us at the last stage, with some modifications to better balance our statutory criteria. After careful consideration, we are confirming the boundaries of these wards as final with minor modifications as described above.

94 The Labour Party and Liberal Democrats proposed new names for Pin Green ward because of the significant changes to the ward. The Labour Party suggested Almond Spring stating that 'it recognises Almond Spring woods, Almond Hill Road and Almond Hill cemetery, all of which are now in the ward'. It also stated that it understood that this had previously been used as a ward name. The Liberal Democrats suggested Almond's Hill stating that the new ward 'now simply does not cover the original Pin Green geographical area'.

95 We agree that this ward is significantly different from the existing ward. We considered that it is likely that either of the proposed names may be appropriate for this ward. However, we note that Almond Spring may have been used as a ward name for a significantly different area. We also note that most of the places in the area including Almond Spring and Almond Lane Cemetery do not have an apostrophe. Therefore, we are renaming the ward Almond Hill.

96 We note that Old Town ward is also significantly different and as part of our draft recommendations we asked for suggestions for a new name for that ward which better reflects the area it covers. We did not receive any proposals during this round of consultation and we are therefore content to keep the name of Old Town.

97 However, if there is a desire to change the ward name in the five years following a review, a local authority may seek the Commission's agreement to change the name of a ward if this reflects community identity and sentiment. After five years, a local authority may make a change without seeking the agreement of the Commission.

98 Almond Hill and Old Town wards are both forecast to have good electoral equality by 2027.

Symonds Green

99 We received two submissions about this area in addition to the borough-wide submissions. These were from residents.

100 The Liberal Democrats supported the draft recommendations in full. The Labour Party proposed moving the few electors in Todd's Green into Woodfield. They expressed the view that most of Todd's Green was outside the local authority area and these electors had no links with the rest of Symonds Green which was some distance away on the other side of the A1(M). Furthermore, they felt that having been built in the 1950s, the Todd's Green properties would have more in common with the older properties in Woodfield.

101 One resident suggested that Symonds Green be split with the Fishers Green area comprising a ward of its own. They did not specify any boundaries. Besides, doing this would create an additional ward in Stevenage and two wards with fewer than three councillors. Stevenage elects by thirds and there is a presumption in law that all the wards will be represented by three councillors. This means 13 wards for the entire local authority area. We will not move away from this without compelling evidence as to why we should. As we did not receive any such community evidence, we did not take this any further.

102 Another resident was of the view that our draft recommendations split Norton Green across two wards. As mentioned in paragraph 63, as far as we know we have not split this community within Stevenage. We have retained the existing boundary in this area.

103 Upon careful consideration of the Labour Party's suggestion, we agree that most of Todd's Green community is located outside the boundaries of Stevenage Borough Council and that the 21 electors within Stevenage will most likely not share much community with the rest of Symonds Green to the south and across the A1(M). However, we note that the same can be said about this community and Woodfield whose closest electors are also on the other side of the A1(M) and farther away than those in Symonds Green. As Todd's Green is at the edge of the borough, we understand that most of their community links might be outside Stevenage. We looked carefully at where best to place this community within Stevenage and are content that the Fishers Green area of Symonds Green is closer to Todd's Green than the Tates Way/Ingleside Drive or the Graveley Road areas in Woodfield ward. We are also satisfied that the railway line is a strong and identifiable boundary. Furthermore, we have not been persuaded to include them in Woodfield purely based on the age of the properties. We are therefore keeping Todd's Green in Symonds Green.

104 However, we are making one minor modification to the boundaries of Symonds Green to include Philbeck House in this ward instead of Old Town. We note that it is

accessed via Maxwell Road in Symonds Green and that it has no access from Old Town.

105 Subject to this minor change, we confirm our draft recommendations as final. Symonds Green is forecast to have good electoral equality by 2027.

Conclusions

106 The table below provides a summary as to the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality in Stevenage, referencing the 2022 and 2027 electorate figures against the proposed number of councillors and wards. A full list of wards, names and their corresponding electoral variances can be found at Appendix A to the back of this report. An outline map of the wards is provided at Appendix B.

Summary of electoral arrangements

	Final recommendations	
	2021	2027
Number of councillors	39	39
Number of electoral wards	13	13
Average number of electors per councillor	1,675	1,807
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	3	0
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	1	0

Final recommendations

Stevenage Borough Council should be made up of 39 councillors serving 13 wards representing 13 three-councillor wards. The details and names are shown in Appendix A and illustrated on the large maps accompanying this report.

Mapping

Sheet 1, Map 1 shows the proposed wards for Stevenage Borough Council. You can also view our final recommendations for Stevenage on our interactive maps at www.consultation.lgbce.org.uk

What happens next?

107 We have now completed our review of Stevenage Borough Council. The recommendations must now be approved by Parliament. A draft Order – the legal document which brings into force our recommendations – will be laid in Parliament. Subject to parliamentary scrutiny, the new electoral arrangements will come into force at the local elections in 2024.

Equalities

108 The Commission has looked at how it carries out reviews under the guidelines set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. It has made best endeavours to ensure that people with protected characteristics can participate in the review process and is sufficiently satisfied that no adverse equality impacts will arise as a result of the outcome of the review.

Appendices

Appendix A

Final recommendations for Stevenage Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2027)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Almond Hill	3	5,382	1,794	7%	5,552	1,851	2%
2	Bandley Hill & Poplars	3	5,559	1,853	11%	5,559	1,853	3%
3	Bedwell	3	5,262	1,754	5%	5,903	1,968	9%
4	Chells	3	5,474	1,825	9%	5,535	1,845	2%
5	Longmeadow	3	4,902	1,634	-2%	5,173	1,724	-5%
6	Manor	3	5,531	1,844	10%	5,531	1,844	2%
7	Martins Wood	3	5,102	1,701	2%	5,177	1,726	-4%
8	Old Town	3	4,188	1,396	-17%	5,735	1,912	6%
9	Roebuck	3	5,109	1,703	2%	5,592	1,864	3%
10	Shephall	3	4,860	1,620	-3%	4,959	1,653	-9%
11	St Nicholas	3	5,354	1,785	7%	5,355	1,785	-1%

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2027)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
12 Symonds Green	3	4,616	1,539	-8%	5,525	1,842	2%
13 Woodfield	3	3,978	1,326	-21%	4,870	1,623	-10%
Totals	39	65,317	–	–	70,467	–	–
Averages	–	–	1,675	–	–	1,807	–

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Stevenage Borough Council.

Note: The 'variance from average' column shows by how far, in percentage terms, the number of electors per councillor in each electoral ward varies from the average for the borough. The minus symbol (-) denotes a lower than average number of electors. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Appendix B

Outline map



A more detailed version of this map can be seen on the large map accompanying this report, or on our website: www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/eastern/hertfordshire/stevenage

Appendix C

Submissions received

All submissions received can also be viewed on our website at:
www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/eastern/hertfordshire/stevenage

Political Groups

- Stevenage Labour Party (x 2)
- Stevenage Liberal Democrats

Councillors

- Councillor J. Brown (Stevenage Borough Council)
- Councillor B. Facey (Stevenage Borough Council), Councillor A. Farquharson (Stevenage Borough Council) and Councillor A. Mitchell (Hertfordshire County Council & Stevenage Borough Council)

Local Residents

- 94 local residents

Appendix D

Glossary and abbreviations

Council size	The number of councillors elected to serve on a council
Electoral Change Order (or Order)	A legal document which implements changes to the electoral arrangements of a local authority
Division	A specific area of a county, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever division they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the county council
Electoral inequality	Where there is a difference between the number of electors represented by a councillor and the average for the local authority.
Electorate	People in the authority who are registered to vote in elections. We only take account of electors registered specifically for local elections during our reviews.
Number of electors per councillor	The total number of electors in a local authority divided by the number of councillors
Over-represented	Where there are fewer electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Parish	A specific and defined area of land within a single local authority enclosed within a parish boundary. There are over 10,000 parishes in England, which provide the first tier of representation to their local residents

Parish council	A body elected by electors in the parish which serves and represents the area defined by the parish boundaries. See also 'Town council'
Parish (or town) council electoral arrangements	The total number of councillors on any one parish or town council; the number, names and boundaries of parish wards; and the number of councillors for each ward
Parish ward	A particular area of a parish, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever parish ward they live for candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the parish council
Town council	A parish council which has been given ceremonial 'town' status. More information on achieving such status can be found at www.nalc.gov.uk
Under-represented	Where there are more electors per councillor in a ward or division than the average
Variance (or electoral variance)	How far the number of electors per councillor in a ward or division varies in percentage terms from the average
Ward	A specific area of a district or borough, defined for electoral, administrative and representational purposes. Eligible electors can vote in whichever ward they are registered for the candidate or candidates they wish to represent them on the district or borough council

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) was set up by Parliament, independent of Government and political parties. It is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. It is responsible for conducting boundary, electoral and structural reviews of local government.

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