

**Draft Recommendations for New Electoral Arrangements
for North Northamptonshire by the Local Government
Boundary Commission for England (May 2023).**

Response by Wellingborough Conservative Association

Overview

We welcome the recommendations by the Boundary Commission. They are well reasoned and show an understanding of the local communities and the links between them.

Since our local knowledge is largely confined to the Wellingborough area, we have no comment to make about the recommendations beyond it.

The areas that we know well are:

- Bozeat
- Earls Barton
- Easton Maudit
- Finedon
- Great Doddington
- Higham Ferrers
- Irchester
- Irthlingborough
- Little Irchester
- Raunds
- Rushden
- Wellingborough
- Wilby
- Wollaston

Plus the villages that are close to these settlements.

We have no substantive objections to the Boundary Commission's suggestions for the other parts of North Northamptonshire.

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Irthlingborough Ward

In Paragraph 74 of the LGBC's Draft Proposals, it is suggested that Irthlingborough should be a two-member ward. The same paragraph invites further evidence to support this suggestion.

Original Submission about Irthlingborough Ward

In our original submission, we stated the following:

"The community hubs in Irthlingborough are the Day Centre in College Street and the Crow Hill Community Centre run by Irthlingborough Town Council.

*The Irthlingborough division under the County Council included five nearby villages, but there is no strong community link between the town and three of the villages (viz. Ringstead, Woodford and Denford). The two other villages within the old NCC Division are Little Addington, Great Addington, and these **do** have strong links to Irthlingborough.*

The town itself is split in two halves by the A6 with the Crow Hill settlement quite a distance away from the main town. The town itself was previously split into 2 wards, though there was no good reason for this. It was only done to get District wards of the correct size.

The town itself, including Crow Hill, has 7484 voters, which is too small for a 2-councillor NNC ward. (The ideal size of a 2-councillor ward NNC is 8180.)

There is no reasonable way to split Irthlingborough into several wards. It has a distinct identity, and a strong sense of community.

We propose to keep this as a 2 member ward and to add the two nearest villages of Little and Great Addington to it. These two villages are linked to Irthlingborough by a spine road (Addington Road) that runs through them and into Irthlingborough.

The communities are linked by their shopping habits. (The residents of the Addingtons normally shop in Irthlingborough). They also share the Spinneybrook Medical Centre in the centre of Irthlingborough.

Further, many children from these villages will attend Huxlow Academy, in Irthlingborough."

Additional Data About Irthlingborough

We now provide additional evidence to support the proposed 2-councillor ward for Irthlingborough:

- **Day Centre**

The Day Centre in Irthlingborough provides meals and entertainment for elderly and vulnerable residents of Irthlingborough. It is run by Cando Care.

- **I-Grow**

Sometime around 2007, East Northamptonshire Council set up i-Grow as an Area Based Initiative. It has evolved since then and is now a significant community group within Irthlingborough.

- **Electorate**

The 2028 forecast for the electorate of the proposed Irthlingborough ward is 8,030. For an ideal two-member ward, the number of electors is 8,422. Thus, the proposed Irthlingborough ward has a variance of (-4.6%), well within the 10% margin.

- **Crow Hill Community Centre**

This community centre is run by the Town Council and is used by local groups such as slimming world and for i-Grow events, such as their Bingo night.

- **Allotments**

The Irthlingborough Allotment Association, as a rule, only allows residents of Irthlingborough to join and have an allotment. They currently have 21 Irthlingborough residents on their waiting list.

- **Churches**

St Peter's Church is the Anglican church in Irthlingborough. It is part of The Nene Crossings Benefice, which also includes churches in Little Addington and Great Addington, plus Woodford. This is further evidence of the links between Irthlingborough and the Addingtons.

Other active churches in Irthlingborough are the Irthlingborough Methodist Church and the very active Salvation Army chapel, which also has a shop in the High Street.

Finedon Ward

In Paragraph 74 of the LGBC's Draft Proposals, it is suggested that Finedon should be a one-member ward. The same paragraph invites further evidence to support this suggestion.

Our Original Submission About Finedon

In our original submission, we stated the following:

The Town has a number of community groups, typified by the rescue of Finedon library.

The library was scheduled for closure by the now-defunct County Council. The community pulled together to keep the library open and it is now thriving and run by volunteers. It organises such groups such as Rhyme Time, Story time, Stay-and-Play, Musical Funtime, Book club, Craft club, Wellness walk, Warm Space, donations of warm clothing and Community market etc.

Finedon is well known for its annual Scarecrow competition, with entries appearing in gardens right across the village.

St Mary the Virgin church is the main parish church and there is a strong community there, which runs lots of activities including Craft-and-Chat and the Christmas Tree Festival. Its Annual Flower Show is attended by over 2000 people. Working out of the church, the Mothers' Union is also active in the village.

The Independent Wesleyan Church is another focal point of the village.

There is also a Finedon Community centre, which hosts Mums-and-Tots, Badminton, Beavers and Scouts etc. Other community rooms are the Star Hall (which hosts an annual pantomime and other celebrated productions each year) and the Mission Hall.

Additional Data About Finedon

We can now add some additional supporting data.

- **Finedon Infant School & Finedon Mulso CE Junior School**

These two schools serve Finedon. Both schools have as one of its objectives to

"Encourage all pupils to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives and make a positive contribution to their local community."

- **NHS GP Service**

Finedon is served by a GP practice at the Summerlee Medical Centre in Wellingborough Road, in the centre of Finedon.

- **Football**

Finedon Town play in the Nene Sunday League. Finedon Victoria Junior Football Club was founded in 1977.

- **Cricket**

Finedon Dolben Cricket Club play in the Northamptonshire Cricket League.

- **Other Sports**

Finedon Tennis Club is popular, and Finedon Town Bowls Club is 100 years old this year.

- **Other Community Groups**

Finedon Townswomen's Guild is in its 75th year, and the Finedon Over 60s Club meets weekly.

Finedon's Tingdene Entertainers perform several times a year.

Also, Finedon has its own Branch of the Royal British Legion.

- **Finedon-Based Facilities**

Finedon Allotment and Gardening Association has a long history.

The Finedon Pocket Park was created in 2000 and is well maintained.

The Town also has its own theatre (formerly the Star Hall), and a showground (formerly the Partridge Club).

Taken together with the points in our original submission, these additional points provide very strong support for Finedon being a one-councillor NNC ward.

Reasons for Separating Finedon and Irthlingborough

These two towns are both self-contained and have little in common. In our original submission, we recommended putting the two towns in different wards. We now supply additional reasons for doing so:

- **Road Links**

The A6 goes through both towns, but there is significant open space between them. In practice, both towns are mostly linear developments,

Irthlingborough clusters on either side of the B571, running from Wellingborough north-east through Irthlingborough, Crow Hill and the Addingtons.

Finedon is mostly built on either side of the A510, which runs from Wellingborough in a more northerly direction, through Finedon and then on to Thrapston.

- **Lack of Community Links**

As shown above (and in the section on Finedon), the two towns have considerable internal community cohesion, but few strong links to outside areas. This is changing in Irthlingborough, as its links to Rushden and Higham Ferrers grow. There is no such change occurring in Finedon.

- **Rushden Lakes**

The Rushden Lakes scheme is Europe's premier retail/leisure/wildlife centre. It provides around 3,000 local jobs, many of which are for workers from Irthlingborough. This is generating progressively stronger links between Irthlingborough and communities to the south of it.

- **Irthlingborough's Coalescence with Higham Ferrers**

In the area of the A6 bridge over the River Nene, Irthlingborough has already coalesced with Higham Ferrers, in the same way as Rushden and Higham are now a single urban area.

In effect, Rushden, Higham and Irthlingborough are moving towards becoming a single conglomeration.

- **Police Liaison Committee**

Rushden, Higham and Irthlingborough share a Joint Action Group for police liaison, as the three towns suffer from similar anti-social behaviour issues.

Finedon is covered by the police liaison committee for the Wellingborough town.

- **Three Towns Plan**

During early work on a Part 2 Plan, East Northamptonshire Council identified the "Three-Towns" area as suitable for a single plan. The three towns that it included were Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Irthlingborough. It did **not** include Finedon.

In summary, Irthlingborough looks south, and not north towards Finedon.

Earls Barton Ward

We originally proposed a 3-councillor ward based upon Earls Barton village. The LGBC's recommendation is a two-member ward.

On reflection, we consider that the LGBC's draft recommendation makes sense, and we support it.

Raunds Ward

We believe that the LGBC's proposals for the Raunds ward are sensible. We have no further comment to make about them.

Irchester Ward

This encompasses Irchester, Wollaston, Bozeat, Little Irchester, Strixton, Grendon, Great Doddington, Easton Maudit and Wilby.

We agree with the Boundary Commission's proposals for Irchester Ward.

Croyland & Swanspool Ward

We agree with the logic of this ward. In one or two places, we would have moved the boundary slightly, but not by a significant amount. The only exception is Millers Park.

Millers Park

In our submission, we proposed that Millers Park be included in the Irchester Ward, rather than the Croyland & Swanspool ward.

However, the Boundary Commission's proposal pointed out that moving Millers Park into the Irchester Ward would force it to be a tiny ward on Wellingborough Town Council, something that is undesirable. We therefore agree with the Boundary Commission's proposal.

Hatton, Victoria and Brickhill/Queensway Wards

We agree with the general design of these wards.

We support the Boundary Commission's suggestions for these three wards.

Rushden & Higham Wards

We support the LGBC's division of Rushden into three 2-councillor wards of roughly equal size. We also support their proposal for a Higham 2-councillor ward.

In our original submission, we proposed a Higham ward that is very similar to the one in the LGBC's draft recommendations. However, we believe that the route of the Higham/Rushden-Lakes border is not ideal. We have two concerns: the Prospect Avenue mini-estate and the parish of Newton Bromswold.

Prospect Avenue Electoral Balance

In Paragraph 77 of the LGBC's Draft Proposals, it is suggested that the border between the Higham and Rushden Lakes wards should be immediately south of Prospect Avenue. This creates a small part of Rushden Parish that is in the Higham ward:

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|------------|
| • Prospect Avenue | 67 homes | 137 voters |
| • The southern end of the Hedges | 52 homes | 111 voters |
| • St. James Close | 56 homes | 104 voters |
| • Firdale Avenue | 27 homes | 40 voters |
| • Handcross Way | 15 homes | 27 voters |
| • Toll Bar (south side) | 12 homes | 25 voters |

giving a total of 229 homes and 444 voters.

Currently this Prospect Avenue "estate" has 444 voters. (Figures taken from current electoral register), These addresses would then form a small parish ward, electing one parish councillor to Rushden Town Council.

This will severely skew the electoral balance on Rushden Town Council. The proposed ward will have one parish councillor for 444 electors, while the rest of Rushden will have one councillor per 1,277 voters (as per the BC projected figures).

It is not a statutory requirement to have electoral balance for wards at the parish level, but a factor of 188% variance does not seem desirable.

We suggest that the Prospect Avenue area should be included in NNC's Rushden Lakes ward, which will then become a seven-member ward at Parish council level.

In effect, we propose that the boundary between the Rushden Lakes ward and the Higham ward should be the parish boundary between Rushden and Higham Ferrers.

With the Prospect Avenue area transferred to the Rushden Lakes ward, the affected NNC wards will be:

| <u>Ward</u> | <u>No. Councillors</u> | <u>No. Voters</u> | <u>Variance 2028</u> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Rushden Lakes ward | 2 | 8,429 | 0% |
| • Higham ward | 2 | 7,803 | -7% |

(This assumes 4,211 electors per councillor, as recommended in the LGBC's draft proposals.)

Our proposed wards are therefore within the 10% margin.

Prospect Avenue Community Identity

We do not believe that the Prospect Avenue “estate” has any significant links to, or community identity in common with, the adjacent part of the Higham ward.

- **Parks and Open Spaces**

The St. James Park play area is the heart of the Prospect Avenue “estate”. It is owned and maintained by Rushden Town Council. It is well-used by children from the Prospect Avenue “estate”.

On the Higham side of the parish boundary, there is a grassed open space, which is mostly used by residents from the Higham side of the border.

Thus, the Prospect Avenue estate and the nearby Higham estate have separate and distinct open space areas at their centre.

- **Denfield Park Primary School**

This school is immediately to the south of John Clark Way, in Rushden Lakes ward. It serves the northern half of the Rushden Lakes ward.

Most of the primary age children from the Prospect Avenue “estate” attend Denfield Park School. They reach it by first walking eastwards, until they reach the East Northamptonshire Greenway, which forms the eastern boundary of the Prospect Avenue “estate”.

The children then walk south along the Greenway, to reach John Clark Way, which they then cross to reach the school.

- **Secondary Schools**

Older children from the Prospect Avenue area have a choice of the Ferrers School (in Higham ward) and Rushden Academy (in the Rushden Lakes ward).

The children are roughly equidistant from both schools. We believe that there is a slight preference for the Rushden Academy, but it is not decisive.

- **Shirley Road Development**

Recently, there was a 5-day planning inquiry into a proposed development called “Shirley Road”. Despite its name, the development is likely to be accessed via the Prospect Avenue “estate”.

Over six hundred letters of objection to this development were received, i.e. nearly three times the number of households in the Prospect Avenue “estate”.

This demonstrates that the community centred on the Prospect Avenue “estate” is many times larger than the proposed Prospect Avenue parish ward.

Many residents spoke at the Public Inquiry. Many were residents of the Peck Way estate and Higham Road (both within the Rushden Lakes ward, but outside the Prospect Avenue “estate”).

This shows that the Prospect Avenue “estate” is tied quite strongly to the adjacent Rushden Lakes ward estates.

Due to the extensive work by the residents of this area to fight this planning appeal, the residents of Peck Way and the Hedges plus St James Close have come closer together into an informal residents association.

In summary, there are no strong links between the Prospect Avenue “estate” and the Higham ward, but the Prospect Avenue “estate” **does** have strong links with the adjacent parts of the Rushden Lakes ward.

Parish of Newton Bromswold

This is a tiny parish of just 66 electors. It is not a natural fit for either Higham ward or a Rushden one. (It probably has more in common with some of the Bedfordshire villages, but they are in a different region, as well as a different District.)

We propose that Newton Bromswold should be within the Higham ward, rather than a Rushden one. We have several reasons for this:

- **Higham Neighbourhood Plan**

Newton Bromswold is included in the Higham Neighbourhood Plan. This involved a referendum of the residents of both Higham Ferrers and Newton Bromswold. It was held in 2016, with 91.6% voting in favour of adopting the Plan.

At the time, there was no objection from anybody about the two parishes sharing a neighbourhood plan. We are unaware of any subsequent objection.

We can therefore conclude that the residents of Newton Bromswold are comfortable with being attached to Higham Ferrers.

- **Urban-Rural**

The Higham ward includes the villages of Chelveston and Caldecott. It also includes several other tiny settlements that are in the area. By contrast, Rushden's three wards are almost exclusively urban.

Newton Bromswold is a very rural parish. It therefore would make sense for it to be linked with Higham, which is partly rural, rather than with Rushden, which isn't.

- **Community Opinion**

We canvassed residents of Newton Bromswold. We could not find a single resident who wished to be linked with Rushden. The majority of those who expressed an opinion, wished to continue their historic connection to Higham Ferrers.

Electoral Impact of Newton Bromswold Being in Higham Ward

Newton Bromswold currently has 66 electors and there is little prospect of that number changing before 2028. We can therefore estimate that the electoral impact of moving Newton Bromswold to the Higham ward (plus moving the Prospect Avenue "estate" to Rushden Lakes) would be:

| <u>Ward</u> | <u>No. Councillors</u> | <u>No. Voters</u> | <u>Variance 2028</u> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Rushden Lakes ward | 2 | 8,363 | -0.1% |
| • Higham ward | 2 | 7,869 | -6.5% |

(This assumes 4,211 electors per councillor, as recommended in the LGBC's draft proposals.)

This is comfortably within the 10% margin, while respecting existing community links and local identity.

Summary

In summary, we would ask the Boundary Commission to look again at the Rushden Lakes and Higham wards and take on board our comments above.

In all other respects we agree with the Boundary Commission's proposals.