

Worcestershire

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Comment text:

Please see attached.

Attached Documents:

- response-to-lgbce-worcestershire-review-accompanying-documents---evesham-retail-centres.pdf
- response-to-lgbce-worcestershire-review.pdf

Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Worcestershire Boundary Review

Councillor Mark Goodge, March 2024

This submission is not an attempt to propose a full divisional pattern for the entire county. It merely covers some salient points regarding divisional boundaries in and around the town of Evesham.

Please note that, although I am both a town and district councillor, these views are my own and should not be taken as representative of the councils on which I serve.

Introduction

Firstly, it must be said that the current divisional boundaries are less than ideal, and the draft proposals make them worse, not better.

Both the current divisions and the draft proposals place a part of Evesham in the Harvington division. But there are several issues with this.

From a geographical and cultural perspective, the urban area of Evesham has little or nothing in common with the rural area of the county further north. In particular, Inkberrow has no natural links with Evesham, and the various small villages (The Lenches) in the central area of the division have a rural environment and ethos which differs significantly from the urban context of Evesham.

This has a practical effect on the representation of Evesham residents of the Harvington division. Evesham's town and district councillors are used to hearing complaints from residents of the Harvington division that their county councillor takes no interest in them. The county councillor for Harvington has never, in all the time I have been an Evesham Town councillor, attended an Evesham Town Council meeting – unlike the county councillors for Evesham South and Evesham North West, who have attended frequently.

You could, of course, argue that this is simply down to individual failings, and a better councillor would be more effective. But the reality is that it has been this way for as long as I remember, over several different councillors for the Harvington division. A more realistic appraisal would conclude that this is an undesirable, but inevitable, consequence of the nature of the division. The Evesham part of it is simply too different to the rest to be easily covered by a single councillor. The focus of the Harvington

county councillor has to be on Inkberrow and the rural heart of the division, not its urban south.

The draft proposals exacerbate that issue rather than solving it. Extending the Harvington division further into Evesham simply creates a larger part of Evesham that will inevitably lack effective representation at county level.

The draft proposals would include the commercial and leisure heart of Evesham, centred on Bridge Street, the east side of High Street and Vine Street, the Market Square, Crown Meadow and Abbey Park, in the Harvington division (see the included Retail Areas map). But these are areas with significant issues, particularly highways and traffic, for which the county council is the responsible authority. And they are also things which matter to all of Evesham's residents, not just those who live in that part of town. While the number of electors who live in that area is relatively small, the retail centre has a significance which extends considerably beyond pure electoral mathematics.

Our county councillors for the divisions which currently cover the town centre have expended a large amount of time and effort campaigning for improvements to the town centre, with considerable success, as well as liaising with local community groups who use the parks in order to ensure that the county council effectively supports the events which are a key aspect of the town's calendar.

It's hard to see how a councillor who is responsible primarily for the rural areas to the north would be able to give Evesham town centre that much attention, even if they were willing to do so. The area is currently represented by a county councillor who is based in the town and known to local residents and businesses. That will almost certainly not be the case if the town centre becomes a part of Harvington division. Or, if we were fortunate enough to get an Evesham based county councillor for the new division, it's hard to see how Inkberrow and The Lenches would not suffer as a consequence. Inkberrow residents are just as unlikely to be happy with being represented by a councillor who is focussed on Evesham as Evesham residents would be with being represented by a councillor who is focussed on Inkberrow. And both would be equally unhappy with a councillor who falls between two stools and serves neither community effectively. The proposed division is simply not fit for purpose.

A different way forward

Part of the reason for the draft proposals seems to me to be an attempt to retain as much of the existing divisions as possible, and to merely update them by relatively minor transfers of polling districts between divisions in order to rebalance the numbers. But for Evesham, I think that what is needed instead is to start with a clean slate, and then find a divisional pattern which best meets the needs of residents – even if the resulting divisions have no resemblance to the current ones.

Electorate numbers

The projected 2029 electorate for Evesham is just under or just over 22,000, depending on whether we go by the civic parish boundary or the contiguous built-up area (which extends somewhat beyond the parish boundary). This is an awkward number for county electoral purposes, as the average projected electorate is 8,687 per councillor which doesn't divide neatly into Evesham's population. Put simply, Evesham as a whole is too big for two councillors, but too small for three. Something has to give; either part of Evesham has to be taken out and allocated to an otherwise primarily rural and village division (as at present, and as in the draft proposals) or a part of a neighbouring rural area has to be included with Evesham.

Preferred solution

My preference would be to create three, entirely new divisions, based primarily on Evesham but, where appropriate, including some of the surrounding villages in order to make up the numbers. Starting with the base figures for Evesham parish itself, but also including polling district ABA in Aldington parish (which is part of Evesham's built-up area and has already been included in the district ward of Bengeworth for that reason) and polling districts BM (Harvington parish) and CP (Norton and Lenchwick parish) gives a total projected electorate of 24,330.

Divided into three, this would result in three divisions with an average electorate of 8,110. That's a variance of -6%, which is comfortably within the acceptable limits. All three divisions would primarily comprise electors from Evesham parish, but at least one of them (and probably two) would extend into neighbouring parishes.

As well as meeting the numerical requirements, this would also have the benefit of including the rest of Evesham's urban overspill – the north side of Greenhill towards the by-pass – within an Evesham division, as well as including the retail and leisure facility currently known as The Valley (shown in pink at the north of the attached map).

Although located in a rural area, The Valley is culturally more a part of Evesham than it is the rural area and would be better represented at county level by being part of an Evesham-centred division.

I have not consulted with Harvington or Norton and Lenchwick residents to see if they would find this acceptable, but I note that Harvington Parish Council, in their response to the first consultation, expressed their connections to Evesham as their nearest urban centre.

This suggestion would require the creation of new polling districts as it isn't possible to allocate the existing Evesham polling districts between three divisions in a way which keeps all of them with acceptable variance. However, some of the polling districts are

quite large and it would not be unreasonable to split them. Three divisions, based broadly around the north, east and south west of the town would be practical.

I note also that Wychavon district as a whole is under-represented in the draft proposals, compared to the other districts and boroughs in the county. One option, therefore, would be to reconsider the decision not to allocate an additional councillor to Wychavon. This would allow all the Wychavon divisions to be slightly smaller and make a three-division solution for Evesham more practical.

Drawbacks

The biggest difficulty with this suggestion is the effect it would have on Harvington division, which would lose a considerable number of electors as well as the village that gives it its name. Also, given that it effectively increases the number of Evesham divisions, it would require the loss of a division elsewhere in order to maintain the same number of councillors. It's possible that the simplest solution to this would be remove Harvington division entirely and allocate its electors that haven't gone into the new Evesham North and Harvington division to other neighbouring divisions. There would almost certainly be other knock-on effects from this which would affect the other rural divisions and therefore require other significant changes to the draft proposals. But I think the overall benefits of a three-division approach to Evesham would considerably outweigh that.

An alternative solution

Whatever changes are made to Evesham's county electoral divisions, I think it is absolutely fundamental that the town centre remains within a division which solely or primarily comprises Evesham electors. However, I recognise that the three-division solution proposed above may have too many knock-on effects on other divisions to be practical.

An alternative solution, therefore, would be – again, starting from a clean slate as regards the town – to consider what parts of the town would be most suitable for inclusion within a neighbouring division, and which neighbouring divisions would have sufficient affinity with Evesham for that to work on a practical level. As I have already stated, I do not believe that the northern part of Evesham and Harvington division meet that requirement.

If a section of Evesham is to be included within a neighbouring division, therefore, a more suitable option would be to transfer polling district BC (the area known as Hampton, and the town council ward of Great Hampton) into Broadway division.

Historically, Hampton was a distinct settlement to Evesham, and remains physically separated by the River Avon and River Isbourne. It's also a self-contained residential

settlement on the edge of town, unlike the parts of north Evesham currently included in Harvington division.

The Broadway division, too, has much stronger links with Evesham than does the Harvington division. Most of the Broadway division, other than the village of Broadway itself, comprises the rural and village hinterland immediately adjacent to Evesham and which naturally looks to Evesham as its nearest urban centre. Broadway village itself, while more distinct, is nonetheless a part of the Vale of Evesham and has strong transport and cultural links with Evesham. Broadway is part of the Evesham high school catchment area and is directly linked to Evesham via the A44. The Broadway division as a whole, therefore, has strong links with Evesham, again unlike the Harvington division which includes a large area that has no meaningful links to Evesham at all.

Transferring polling district BC into Broadway division, along with transferring polling districts BEA and ABA into Evesham divisions would result in a combined electorate for Evesham of 19,085. This is slightly higher than the combined figure of 18,972 from the draft proposals, but it would still be within acceptable variance. Alternatively, leaving polling district ABA in the Littletons division would result in a combined Evesham electorate of 18,676, which is closer to the ideal than the draft proposals would achieve.

Transferring polling district BC into Broadway division would increase Broadway's electorate beyond acceptable variance. However, transferring BEA into Evesham would reduce Harvington's electorate. Since Broadway and Harvington divisions are themselves neighbours, this could be offset, at least as far as Harvington is concerned, by transferring polling districts AU, AP and BI (Crophorne, Charlton and Fladbury) from Broadway to Harvington. This would still leave Broadway with an excess of electors, but adopting the county council's suggestion of transferring Sedgeberrow (polling district CZB) into Bredon division would bring it back within justifiable limits.

Again, this suggestion would require splitting polling districts within Evesham as the existing districts in Evesham (minus Hampton) can't be divided into two evenly sized divisions. But given that divisional boundaries within an urban area are essentially arbitrary, this is unlikely to be an issue. Alternatively, it might be better to have a single, two councillor Evesham division.

Summary

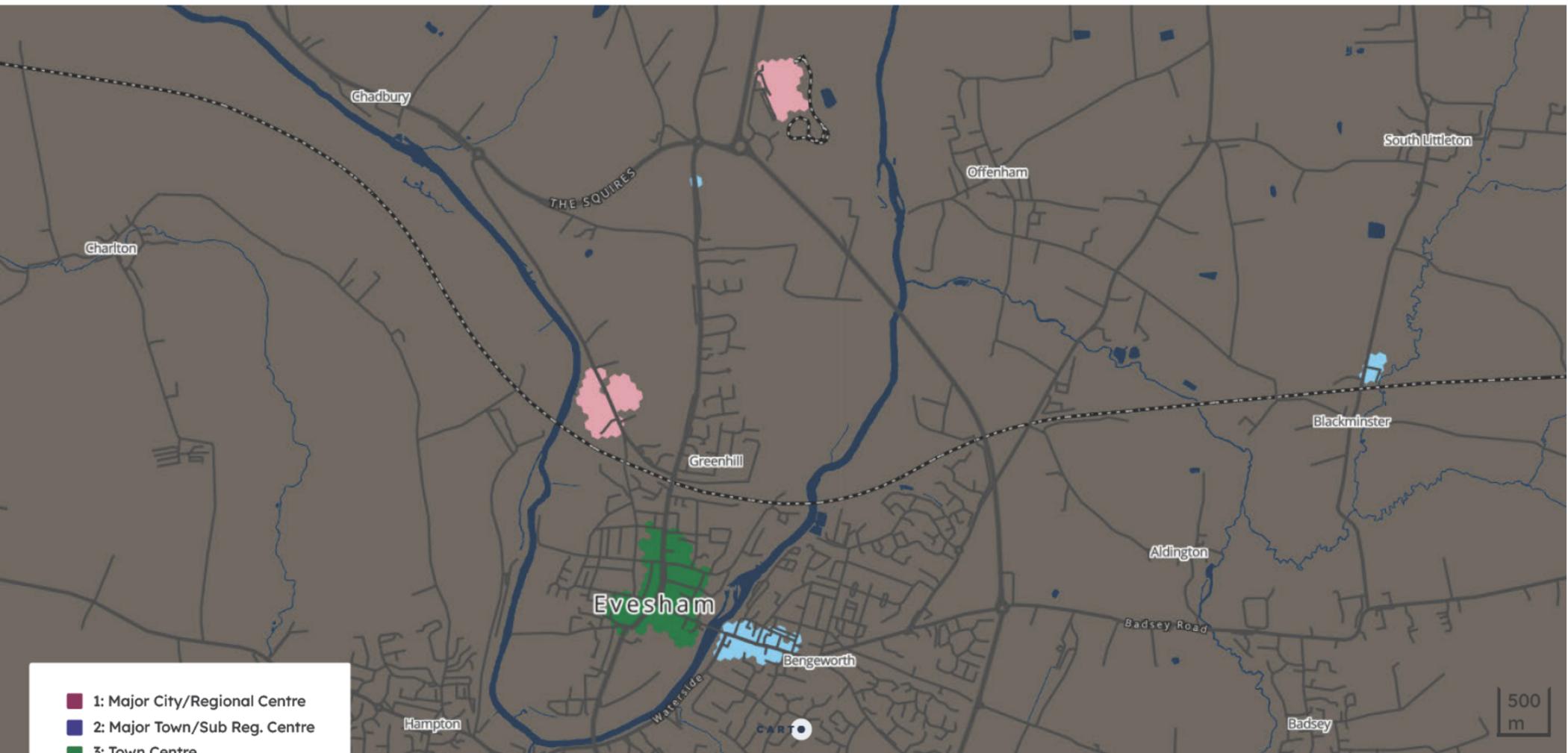
My two suggested solutions are not intended to be absolute, and it may be that there are other options which still achieve the same goals but which work better in terms of electoral equality. The most important thing is to ensure that Evesham town centre continues to be part of a division which is centred on Evesham rather than a distant rural area. The aim of my suggested solutions is to give examples of how that can be achieved and demonstrate that it is possible. But a different solution which nonetheless

retains the town centre in an Evesham division would be equally acceptable. Putting the various options in order of preference from best to worst, would result in this list:

1. A three-division solution, achieved by bringing in a small part of the neighbouring rural area into one or more Evesham-based divisions (my first option).
2. Bringing the north of Evesham back into an Evesham division but balancing it by transferring a more geographically discrete part of Evesham to a neighbouring division (my second option).
3. Any other solution which both retains the town centre in an Evesham division and transfers the north of Evesham back into an Evesham division.
4. Any other solution which retains the town centre in an Evesham division.
5. The status quo, despite its lack of electoral equality.
6. The draft proposals, or any other solution which transfers Evesham town centre out of an Evesham division.

Attachments

Evesham Retail Centres – showing the primary town centre (green) as well as the secondary retail areas (blue and pink). The proposed divisions would include the majority of the town centre (green) in the Harvington division.



- 1: Major City/Regional Centre
- 2: Major Town/Sub Reg. Centre
- 3: Town Centre
- 4: Market Town
- 5 District Centre
- 6: Local Centre
- 7: Small Local Centre
- 8: Large Retail Park
- 9: Small Retail Park
- 10: Large Shopping Centre
- 11: Small Shopping Centre

Retail Centres

Retail Futures

A map of retail centres

LOCAL AUTHORITY IS
All Local Authorities

LINK MAP
[https://mapmaker.cdrc.ac.uk/#/retail-centres?
m=classif_intid&lon=-1.9378&lat=52.1028&zoom=13.09](https://mapmaker.cdrc.ac.uk/#/retail-centres?m=classif_intid&lon=-1.9378&lat=52.1028&zoom=13.09)