

**ELECTORAL REVIEW OF EAST
HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT
COUNCIL**

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION
ON DRAFT LGBCE
RECOMMENDATIONS**

5 MAY 2022

East Herts Conservative Group is the majority party on East Hertfordshire District Council. At the last elections in 2019, the Conservative Party won 40 of the 50 seats on the Council.

The Conservative Group made a submission to the consultation at stage 3 on the warding arrangements. Upon release of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Draft Recommendations we considered the report and found ourselves broadly supportive of the proposals.

It was immediately clear that the LGBCE's three statutory criteria had been broadly satisfied in the recommendation.

Taking each of the statutory criteria in turn:

1. *"Improving electoral equality by equalising the number of electors that each councillor represents"*

Throughout the warding arrangements proposed we believe that the LGBCE has fulfilled this criteria, and that no changes are required to satisfy this criteria.

2. *"Ensuring that the recommendations reflect community identity"*

The LGBCE has been particularly successful in reflecting community identity in this report. Of particular note is that the number of split parishes has been markedly reduced. Within the LGBCE's draft recommendations, the parishes of Tewin, Thorley and Standon have been reunited after being split between wards in the last review. Reuniting these parishes within a single District Council ward will better reflect community identity in the villages of East Herts. Within the towns of Hertford, Bishop's Stortford and Buntingford, we believe that the recommendations broadly reflect local community identity, and will expand further on this below. However, we believe that the arrangement of the proposed 'Ware Priory' and 'Great Amwell & Stansteads' wards could be significantly improved. We will expand on this below.

3. *"Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government"*

We believe that the LGBCE has broadly achieved this objective. Our one significant concern is that the proposed town council wards in Bishop's Stortford and Hertford are less than optimal. The number of Bishop's Stortford town council wards has increased from five to nine, with significant variances in town council electoral equality. Similarly in Hertford the number of town council wards rises from four to six, with Bengoe South being particularly undersized. We understand that the alignment of the county council divisions in these towns makes the creation of town and parish wards with strong electoral equality difficult. If the LGBCE is minded to make any adjustments to their proposed draft boundaries in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford, we would request that the impact upon the town council ward electoral equality is considered in depth.

Villages

As we mentioned above, we believe that the LGBCE's proposed 'villages' wards strike a very good balance between the Commission's three statutory criteria. All of the wards proposed are united by strong transport links, communities of interest and look towards the same towns. All of our comments from the consultation at stage 3 on the warding arrangements stand – with the exception

of the arrangements for Stanstead Abbots/Great Amwell – as the LGBCE adopted our proposed scheme.

Bishop's Stortford

We generally support the LGBCE's draft recommendations in Bishop's Stortford. We particularly welcome the decision to use the River Stort as the boundary between the West and East of Bishop's Stortford. While the LGBCE did not accept the Conservative proposals in the west of Bishop's Stortford, we accept that the Commission's draft proposals do strike an adequate balance between the three statutory criteria.

That said, we do propose to make a counter-proposal regarding the boundary between the LGBCE's proposed Bishop's Stortford Thorley Manor, Bishop's Stortford Central and Bishop's Stortford North.

The area in question is shown below:



We see two main issues with the proposed boundaries:

- **The division of the town centre:** The current division of Bishop's Stortford Town Centre is highly unsatisfactory. This was reflected in the strength of feeling locally to place more of the town centre into one ward, and this is noted by the LGBCE at paragraph 49 of its draft recommendations report. Even the draft proposed boundaries split the Town Centre between North, Thorley Manor, and Central. We acknowledge that the county council divisions in the town centre are particularly unhelpful in 'Providing arrangements that support effective and convenient local government' at parish council level. We consider a Community Governance Review with consequential changes to the district/county boundaries may be the best way ahead for the commercial heart of Bishop's Stortford.

However, our proposals below will move parts of the town centre into Central from Thorley Manor. Whereas Central already includes a large part of the town centre and includes more established areas of the town, Thorley Manor is nearly exclusively housing built between the 1980s and 1990s. Our proposed boundaries would move the Town Council offices and the Roman Catholic Church – which are at the edge of the town centre - from Thorley Manor to Central ward.

- **Illogical boundaries:** The proposed Thorley Manor ward predominately covers the west and south-west of Bishop's Stortford. However, a "finger" juts into the centre of Stortford. We struggle to see a community of interest between the residents of Bells Hill, Windhill and The Stewarts who consider themselves to be town centre residents, and the highly suburban St Michael's Mead residents at the other end of the ward.

As a result, we propose to move the streets in Bishop's Stortford town centre in the proposed Thorley Manor Ward to Central Ward. We also propose to move a small number of houses from Thorley Manor to North to prevent the ward boundaries on Hadham Road being very confusing.

Streets Moving From Thorley Manor to Central		Streets Moving From Thorley Manor to North	
Windhill	193	67-83 Hadham Road	14
Regency Close	26		
Jeans Lane	18		
Marwell Place	11		
Windhill Fields	6		
Windhill Old Road	13		
The Stewarts	92		
Windhill Gardens	9		
Total	368	Total	14

The impact on the population and variance in the three wards impacted is as follows

	LGBCE		Counter-Proposal	
	2027 Population	Variance	2027 Population	Variance
Bishop's Stortford Thorley Manor (3)	8,382	6%	8,000	1%
Bishop's Stortford Central (2)	5,401	2%	5,769	9%
Bishop's Stortford North (3)	8,606	9%	8,620	9%

Ware

We very much support the LGBCE's proposed Ware Rural, Ware St Mary's and Ware Trinity Wards. We believe that they reflect the established and emerging communities in north Ware, support efficient local government and reflect community identities.

However, to the south and south east of Ware we believe a small change could make a significant improvement to the overall warding arrangements.

We have noted the Commission's comments on the proposed Ware Priory ward and the Great Amwell & Stansteads Ward.

However, we wish to propose these two wards be reconfigured to the following layout:

Proposed Ware Priory and Amwell Ward (3)		Proposed Stanstead Abbots Ward (1)	
LGBCE Ware Priory Ward	5647	Stanstead Abbots	1614
Great Amwell Parish	1904	Stanstead St Margarets East	896
Stanstead St Margarets West	452		
Total	8003	Total	2510
Variance	1%	Variance	-5%

We strongly believe that Great Amwell Parish is better paired with Ware than Stanstead Abbots. As the Commission noted at paragraph 66 of its draft recommendation report, “Councillor Curtis, the existing Great Amwell ward councillor, ... provided good evidence of community links between the south of Ware and Great Amwell parish”. We do note that this is achieved at maintaining the division of Stanstead St Margarets Parish. However, the division exists in the current warding pattern, and is well understood by local residents.

Our justifications for this proposal are as follows:

Great Amwell is part of ‘Greater Ware’ rather than ‘Greater Stanstead Abbots’: Given that Great Amwell civil parish contains no shops (other than a garden centre), no GP surgeries, no dentists, no secondary schools and no pharmacy services, residents of Great Amwell village depend strongly on the amenities in Ware. Some of the largest Great Amwell community organisations also meet at premises in Ware. For example, Great Amwell Scout Group is based at a site in Ware civil parish, whilst Amwell Rotary Club meets at Hertford Rugby Club (located in the current Ware Chadwell ward). Amwell Rotary Club organises the annual Ware fireworks display in conjunction with the other two Ware area Rotary clubs (Ware Rotary Club and Hertford Shires Rotary Club). There are thus strong examples of community links between Great Amwell and the rest of the Ware area.

Our Proposed Ware Priory and Amwell Ward has strong transport links: There is a very strong north-south road axis running New Road-Bridge Foot-Amwell End/Viaduct Road-London Road-Amwell Hill/Amwell Lane. The high frequency (every 15 minutes during the week) 310 bus route links Great Amwell and St Margarets West to Ware.

Stanstead Abbots has a distinct identity from Ware and Great Amwell: Stanstead Abbots is highly built-up and townlike, to the extent that it is difficult to label it as a ‘village’ at all, unlike Great Amwell. Cllr Curtis’ submission in the last round of consultation was very clear on these issues. The local issues in Stanstead Abbots are very different from 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) from Great Amwell (Ware South).

If the LGBCE does maintain the boundaries in the draft plan we would request that the “Great Amwell & Stansteads Ward” be named “Great Amwell and Stansteads Ward”. A written out “and” is much preferable to an ampersand when the ward name is being processed in many computer programmes.

Significantly improved electoral equality. The LGBCE’s proposed Ware Priory Ward has a 2027 variance of 7% while Great Amwell & Stansteads is -8%. Our proposed Ware Priory and Amwell has a 2027 variance of 1% and Stanstead Abbots is -5%.

Hertford

As we mentioned above, we believe that the LGBCE's proposed Hertford wards strike a very good balance between the Commission's three statutory criteria. As such we support the recommendations.

Sawbridgeworth

We are particularly pleased that Sawbridgeworth Parish remains undivided in a three-member ward. Sawbridgeworth has a very strong local identity and with no need to split the town to achieve a within quota three-member ward, the proposed Sawbridgeworth Ward is strongly supported by us.

Buntingford

We support the LGBCE's proposals in this area. They keep the whole of Buntingford parish within one ward, and link it only with parishes within the Buntingford Area Neighbourhood Plan.