

New electoral arrangements for Bedford Borough Council Final Recommendations

September 2021

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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.

Contents

Introduction	1
Who we are and what we do	1
What is an electoral review?	1
Why Bedford?	5
Our proposals for Bedford	5
How will the recommendations affect you?	5
Review timetable	6
Analysis and final recommendations	8
Submissions received	8
Electorate figures	8
Number of councillors	9
Ward boundaries consultation	9
Draft recommendations consultation	10
New draft recommendations consultation	10
Final recommendations	11
North East Bedford Town	12
South East Bedford Town	14
North West Bedford Town	17
Kempston	19
South Bedford	21
East Bedford	25
North Bedford	27
West Bedford	29
Conclusions	32
Summary of electoral arrangements	32
Parish electoral arrangements	32
What happens next?	36
Equalities	38
Appendices	40
Appendix A	40
Final recommendations for Bedford Borough Council	40
Appendix B	43

Outline map	43
Appendix C	45
Submissions received	45
Appendix D	47
Glossary and abbreviations	47

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 Bedford?

7 We are conducting a review of Bedford Borough Council ('the Council') as the value of each vote in borough elections varies depending on where you live in Bedford. Some councillors currently represent many more or fewer voters than others. This is 'electoral inequality'. Our aim is to create 'electoral equality', where votes are as equal as possible, ideally within 10% of being exactly equal.

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

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

Our proposals for Bedford

9 Bedford should be represented by 46 councillors, six more than there are now.

10 Bedford should have 28 wards, one more than there are now.

11 The boundaries of all wards but one should change.

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

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, which other communities are in that ward, and, in some cases, which parish council ward you vote in. 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 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 Bedford. We then held four 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
18 February 2020	Number of councillors decided
25 February 2020	Start of consultation seeking views on new wards
4 May 2020	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming draft recommendations
8 June 2020	Start of additional ward consultation in response to Covid-19
20 July 2020	End of additional consultation
29 September 2020	Publication of draft recommendations; start of second consultation
7 December 2020	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming new recommendations
11 May 2021	Publication of new draft recommendations and start of consultation
5 July 2021	End of consultation; we began analysing submissions and forming final recommendations
7 September 2021	Publication of final recommendations

Analysis and final recommendations

17 Legislation² states that our recommendations should not be based only on how many electors³ 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.

	2019	2026
Electorate of Bedford	130,131	148,921
Number of councillors	46	46
Average number of electors per councillor	2,829	3,237

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 but one of our proposed wards for Bedford will have good electoral equality by 2026.

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 The Council submitted electorate forecasts for 2025, a period five years on from the originally scheduled publication of our final recommendations in 2020. These forecasts were broken down to polling district level and predicted an increase in the electorate of around 14% by 2025.

23 Owing to the additional ward consultation in summer 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and to the further round of consultation on new draft recommendations, our final recommendations are being published in 2021 rather than 2020. We therefore worked to a 2026 electoral forecast, and are content that

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

³ Electors refers to the number of people registered to vote, not the whole adult population.

the Council's original forecast represents a reasonable estimate of the number of electors for the borough by 2026. We have used these figures to produce our final recommendations.

Number of councillors

24 Bedford Borough Council currently has 40 councillors. We looked at evidence provided by the Council and concluded that increasing this number by six will ensure the Council can carry out its roles and responsibilities effectively.

25 We therefore invited proposals for new patterns of wards that would be represented by 46 councillors – for example, 46 one-councillor wards or a mix of one-, two-, and three-councillor wards.

26 We received no submissions about the number of councillors in response to our consultation on our new draft recommendations. We therefore confirm our recommendation that the borough should be represented by 46 councillors.

Ward boundaries consultation

27 We received 89 submissions in response to our consultation on ward boundaries. These included two borough-wide proposals from the Liberal Democrat and Conservative groups and a partial proposal from the Labour Group. The Labour Group's proposal focused on Bedford town, Kempston, Great Barford, Bromham, Biddenham, and Clapham. The remainder of the submissions provided localised comments for warding arrangements in particular areas of the borough.

28 The two borough-wide schemes provided mixed patterns of one- and two-councillor wards for Bedford. The partial scheme submitted by the Labour Group provided a mixed pattern of one-, two-, and three-councillor wards. We carefully considered the proposals received and were of the view that the pattern of wards proposed by the Liberal Democrat Group resulted in good levels of electoral equality in most areas of the authority and generally used clearly identifiable boundaries.

29 Both the Conservative and Labour groups' submissions contained multiple wards with high electoral variances, so did not form the basis of our recommendations. However, elements of both schemes were adopted in our draft recommendations, where we considered that they more closely reflected the statutory criteria than the Liberal Democrat Group scheme.

30 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.

31 Given the travel restrictions, and the social distancing, arising from the Covid-19 outbreak, there was a detailed virtual tour of Bedford. This helped to clarify issues raised in submissions and assisted in the construction of our recommendations.

Draft recommendations consultation

32 We received 207 responses to the consultation on our initial set of draft recommendations. These included partial schemes from the Conservative Group, Labour Group, Bedford Green Party, as well as Kempston Labour Party, Kempston borough councillors, and Kempston Town Council. All of these proposals suggested modifications to certain areas of our draft recommendations. The Liberal Democrat Group submission made two minor changes to our draft recommendations.

33 Of these submissions, 55 concerned the Castle Road area, and 43 referred to the area covered by the existing Queens Park ward. We also received 32 submissions regarding wards in the rural south of the borough, 13 in response to our draft recommendations for Kempston, and 11 for wards in the rural north of the borough. Almost all of these submissions were unresponsive of our draft recommendations. Consequently, we adopted elements of the warding schemes received for all these areas, except in the rural south of the borough, where we created a new set of proposed wards in response to the submissions received.

34 The scale of these changes, and the division of the parish of Elstow between two wards to accommodate our proposals in the rural south, convinced us that it would be proper to consult on a new set of draft recommendations before publishing our final recommendations.

New draft recommendations consultation

35 We received 200 submissions during the consultation on our new draft recommendations. These included alternative proposals from Bedford Borough Conservative Councillor Group ('the Conservatives'), Bedford Borough Labour Group ('Labour'), Bedford Borough Council Liberal Democrats Group ('the Liberal Democrats'), and the Bedford Green Party ('the Greens'). The Conservatives opposed three-councillor wards in Queens Park and Cauldwell, while again submitting their initial proposals for the rural south of the borough.

36 The Labour submissions made alternative proposals for Cauldwell, Kingsbrook, and Wixams & Wilstead wards. The Liberal Democrats expressed a preference for our initial draft recommendations, while also making alternative proposals in Castle, Cauldwell, Kingsbrook and Newnham wards, as well as the rural south, should we

not choose to revert to the original draft recommendations. The Greens suggested alternative boundaries in Castle, Cauldwell, and Kingsbrook wards, as well as the rural south of the borough. We have adopted elements of these proposals in our final recommendations. The majority of the other submissions focused on specific areas, particularly our proposals in Cauldwell and Wixams & Wilstead.

37 Our final recommendations are based on the new draft recommendations with a modification to the boundary between Cauldwell and Wixams & Wilstead wards, placing Elstow's historic village back in Wixams & Wilstead ward. We also make minor modifications to the boundaries between Cauldwell and Kingsbrook wards, Castle and Priory wards, Goldington and Putnoe wards, and Riseley and Sharnbrook wards.

Final recommendations

38 Our final recommendations are for three three-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards and 13 one-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.

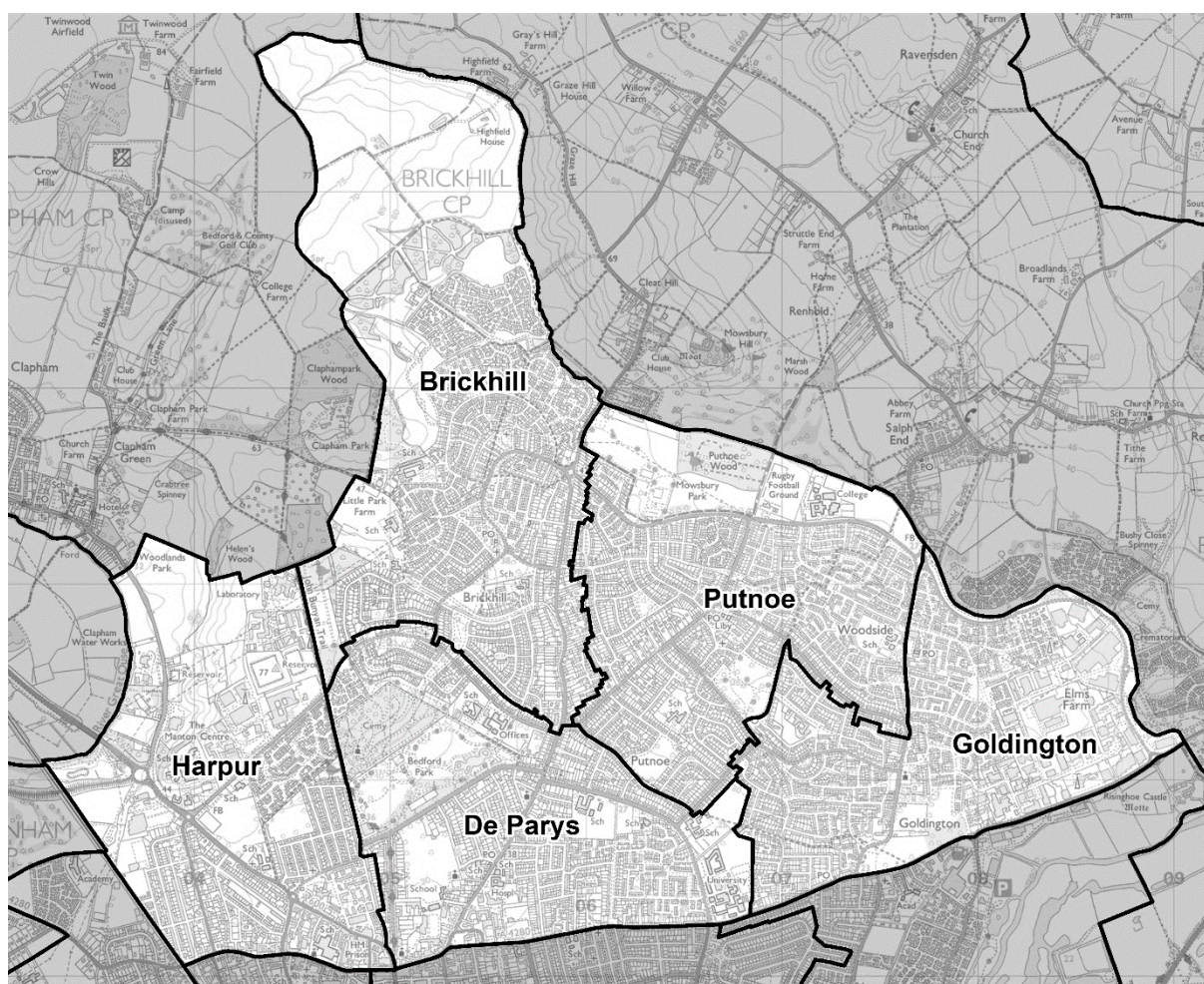
39 The tables and maps on pages 12–31 detail our final recommendations for each area of Bedford. They detail how the proposed warding arrangements reflect the three statutory⁴ criteria of:

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

40 A summary of our proposed new wards is set out in the table starting on page 40 and on the large map accompanying this report.

⁴ Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

North East Bedford Town



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Brickhill	2	4%
De Parys	2	-6%
Goldington	2	-5%
Harpur	2	8%
Putnoe	2	3%

Brickhill and De Parys

41 We received 18 submissions from residents in response to our new draft recommendations for Brickhill, two of which were supportive. The remaining submissions were almost equally divided between those which opposed Woodlands Park's inclusion in the ward and those which opposed the inclusion of Brickhill Drive and its attendant streets in De Parys ward.

42 The reasoning for Brickhill Drive's inclusion in De Parys ward has been discussed in previous reports – namely, that its inclusion in Brickhill ward would result in an 18% variance, which is a considerably higher variance than we would

normally accept. Six resident submissions and, additionally, the Liberal Democrat proposals suggested Woodlands Park be moved from our proposed Brickhill ward to either Renhold & Ravensden ward or an enlarged Great Barford ward. While this would have the effect of enabling the inclusion of Brickhill Drive in Brickhill ward with a variance of 1%, we do not believe that this would be conducive to effective and convenient local government. Despite residents' assertions that the area had more in common with the surrounding rural parishes, we were unable to find evidence of any road links which did not involve first driving south through Brickhill. We are aware of the planned Graze Hill development in Ravensden, adjacent to Woodlands Park. However, having studied the planning application, we were unable to find evidence of a new road between the two which could link Woodlands Park with Graze Hill and Bedford Road. Furthermore, we are of the understanding that Woodlands Park was recently included in Brickhill parish during a community governance review precisely because it is effectively an urban extension of Brickhill, which our virtual tour of the area confirmed. We have therefore maintained our new draft recommendations for Brickhill and De Parys wards.

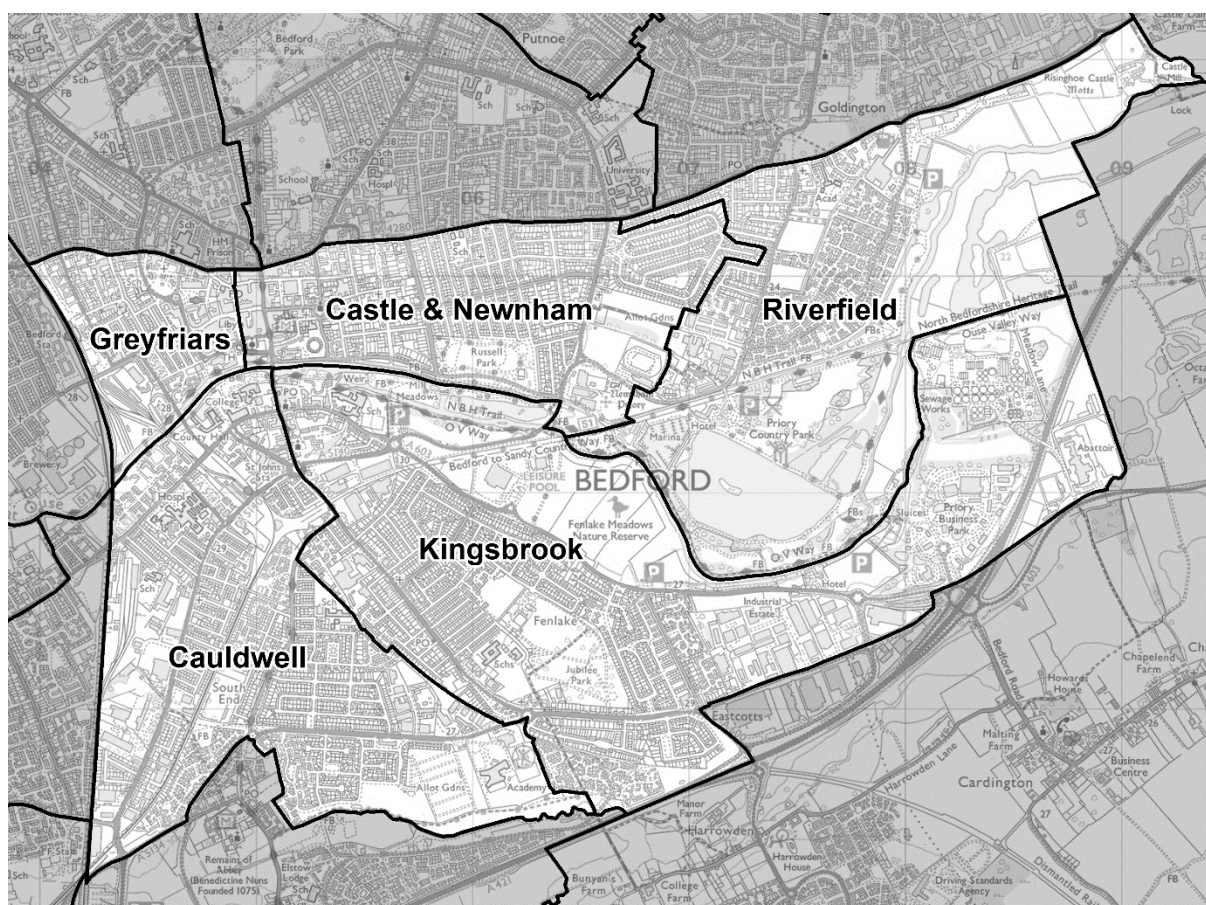
Goldington and Putnoe

43 We received two resident submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for Putnoe. One agreed with our proposal to move Mendip Crescent from De Parys ward to Putnoe, while the other opposed our proposal to move the eastern half of Putnoe Street into Goldington ward. The resident described shared use of shops, libraries and dog walking areas between residents of Putnoe Street and Putnoe ward. Given this further evidence, we have adopted the resident's suggestion in our final recommendations and brought all of Putnoe Street and Cheltenham Close into Putnoe ward. This results in electoral variances of -5% in Goldington ward and 3% in Putnoe.

Harpur

44 We received three submissions from residents in response to our new draft recommendations for Harpur ward, all of which were supportive, specifically of the inclusion of both sides of Tavistock Street in the proposed ward. We therefore confirm our recommendations for this ward as final.

South East Bedford Town



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Castle & Newnham	2	-5%
Cauldwell	3	1%
Greyfriars	1	7%
Kingsbrook	2	9%
Riverfield	1	-10%

Castle & Newnham, Greyfriars, and Riverfield

45 We received 16 submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for Castle, Newnham, and Priory wards, all of which were supportive. In particular, the inclusion of the entire Castle Road area in Castle ward and the creation of a separate town centre ward in Priory were well received. Our proposals for the three wards were also addressed in the Conservative, Green, Labour, and Liberal Democrat submissions.

46 The Conservatives supported the proposed wards, particularly Priory, which they recognised as being broadly in line with their own suggestion. The Greens reiterated their view that the forecast 12 electors living on the river side of St Paul's Square should be included in Castle ward, rather than Priory, as they share many of

the same issues as residents living on the High Street. We were convinced by this evidence and have adopted it in our final recommendations. Labour were broadly in agreement with our proposals. The Liberal Democrats favoured our draft recommendations but argued that, if we confirmed our new draft recommendations, Castle ward should also include the allotments, Bedford International Athletic Stadium, and Aspects Leisure Centre south of Aylesbury Road to the Route 52 cycle path. As we noted, these sites are accessible from Newnham Avenue, and provide a more consistent shape for the ward, and we have adopted these boundaries in our final recommendations.

47 The Liberal Democrats also suggested alternative names for Castle and Newnham wards. Noting that Newnham Avenue was now in Castle ward, they suggested there was little point in maintaining this name for Newnham ward. They suggested the ward be renamed Riverfield, after Riverfield Drive, which runs through the ward and gives its name to the Riverfield estate. As this appears to have been the same rationale for the naming of the previous ward, we have adopted this suggestion in our final recommendations.

48 The Liberal Democrats also argued that, as there would be a significant number of electors in the ward who identified with Newnham, this should be incorporated into the name of the ward. They suggested the name 'Castle Newnham'. While this was supported by the existence in the ward of Castle Newnham School – itself named after the merger of Castle Lower School and Newnham Middle School – we felt this had the potential to be historically misleading. In particular, it may imply that Castle Newnham was the name of the Norman castle when in actuality the names of these wards and their associated roads refer to separate historical sites (Bedford Castle and Newnham Priory) at opposite ends of the ward. However, we agree with the suggestion in principle, and have instead renamed the ward Castle & Newnham in our final recommendations.

49 Several residents, as well as Labour and the Conservatives, argued that the name of Priory ward had the potential to cause confusion, owing to the presence of Priory Country Park and Priory Marina, named after Newnham Priory, on the other side of town. The Conservatives suggested it be named 'Town Centre' instead, while Labour and a resident recommended 'Bedford Central'. However, given the ward does not represent the entire town centre – and, notably, High Street is in Castle & Newnham ward – we did not consider this appropriate. Another resident suggested 'Greyfriars', on the basis that this was the name of the historical Franciscan priory – and a former pub – on the site. We noted that Greyfriars is also the name of a major road, car park, and off-licence in the ward, and were sufficiently convinced of its contemporary and historical relevance to adopt it in our final recommendations.

Cauldwell and Kingsbrook

50 We received 16 submissions from residents in response to our new draft recommendations for Cauldwell (see paragraphs 56–63 for those which solely concerned Elstow parish) and Kingsbrook wards. The primary arguments were that Cauldwell was too large a ward, that all of Cardington Road should be in one ward, and that Kingsbrook Road should be in Kingsbrook ward. The Labour submission made similar arguments, suggesting that everything east of St Marys Street and St Johns Street should be in Kingsbrook ward. The Liberal Democrats made a similar suggestion, instead drawing the boundary further west, along the railway line to Ampthill Road. They also noted that their proposal would bring the King's Ditch waterway back into the ward which bears its name (as would the Labour proposal).

51 On our virtual tour of the area, we noted a distinct change in character either side of St Johns Street, from primarily 20th-century retail on the west side to Georgian, Victorian, and Interwar residential to the east. We did not notice a comparable contrast on either side of the railway line and considered that, as St Johns railway station will play an important part in the planned East West Rail route between Oxford and Cambridge, it should not be on the edge of a ward boundary, as in the Liberal Democrat proposal. We have therefore not adopted this proposal in our final recommendations.

52 The Greens' proposals in this area comprised a single-councillor St Johns ward made up of the previously proposed Britannia ward without Victoria Road, Edward Road, Aspley Road, and Ombersley Road, but including St Leonards Street, St Leonards Mews, St Leonards Avenue, Station Road, Ampthill Street south of Ampthill Road, Redwood Grove, and The Sidings. This was accompanied by a two-councillor South ward resembling the remainder of our proposed Cauldwell ward, minus Bedford Academy. While we consider there is merit in this scheme, particularly regarding the future importance of St Johns railway station, we have not adopted it in our final recommendations for reasons detailed above regarding the area east of St Johns Street, which we believe would be better served in Kingsbrook ward. We were, however, sufficiently persuaded by the Labour proposal to adopt it in our final recommendations. This will give Cauldwell ward a 1% variance and Kingsbrook a 9% variance.

North West Bedford Town



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Biddenham	1	-9%
Great Denham	1	-1%
Queens Park	3	-8%

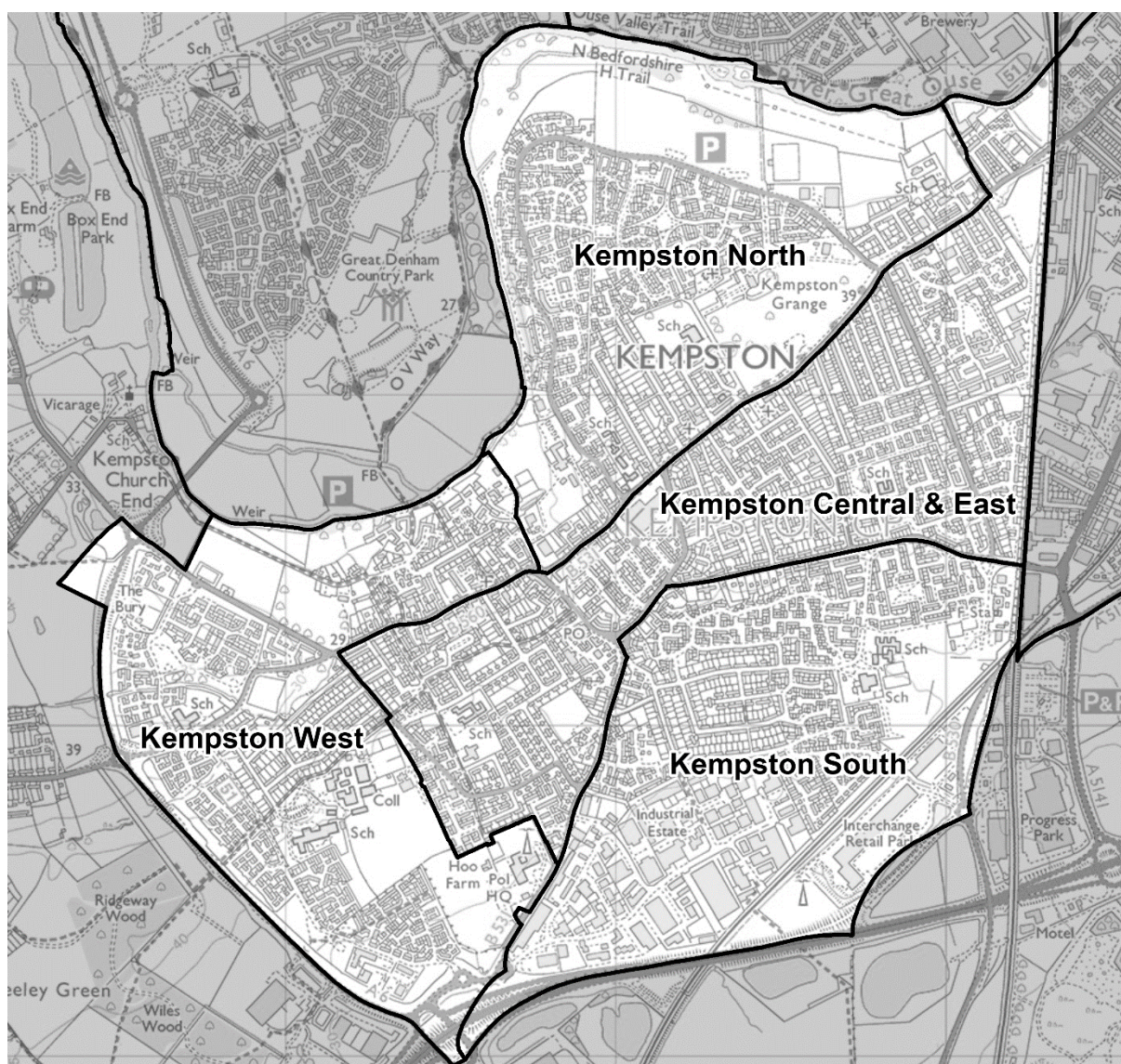
Biddenham, Great Denham, and Queens Park

53 We received six submissions from residents, one from Councillor Mohammed Masud, and one from Faith in Queens Park in response to our new draft recommendations for north-west Bedford town. All of the submissions concerned Queens Park ward, and all but one of them were supportive. The exception was from a resident of the new estate between Bromham Road and Great Ouse Primary Academy, who said their house was sold as being in Biddenham. They added that the planned development of 718 homes north of Bromham Road would link the estate with Biddenham, implying that the area should be included in Biddenham ward. While we appreciate the rationale of this suggestion, removing this many electors from Queens Park ward would result in an electoral variance of at least -11%. We have therefore not adopted this suggestion in our final recommendations.

54 The remaining submissions were supportive of the new draft Queens Park ward as representative of the distinct multi-ethnic and multi-faith character of the

community, which they perceived to have been threatened by the previous proposal to split the ward in two. The proposed ward was also supported by Labour but opposed by the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, and Greens, out of a general opposition to three-councillor wards. We are not opposed to three-councillor wards but, even taking the political groups' concerns about voter representation into consideration, we consider the strong sense of community identity evidenced in the various stages of consultation to take priority when balancing our statutory criteria. We therefore confirm our new draft recommendations for Biddenham, Great Denham, and Queens Park wards as final.

Kempston



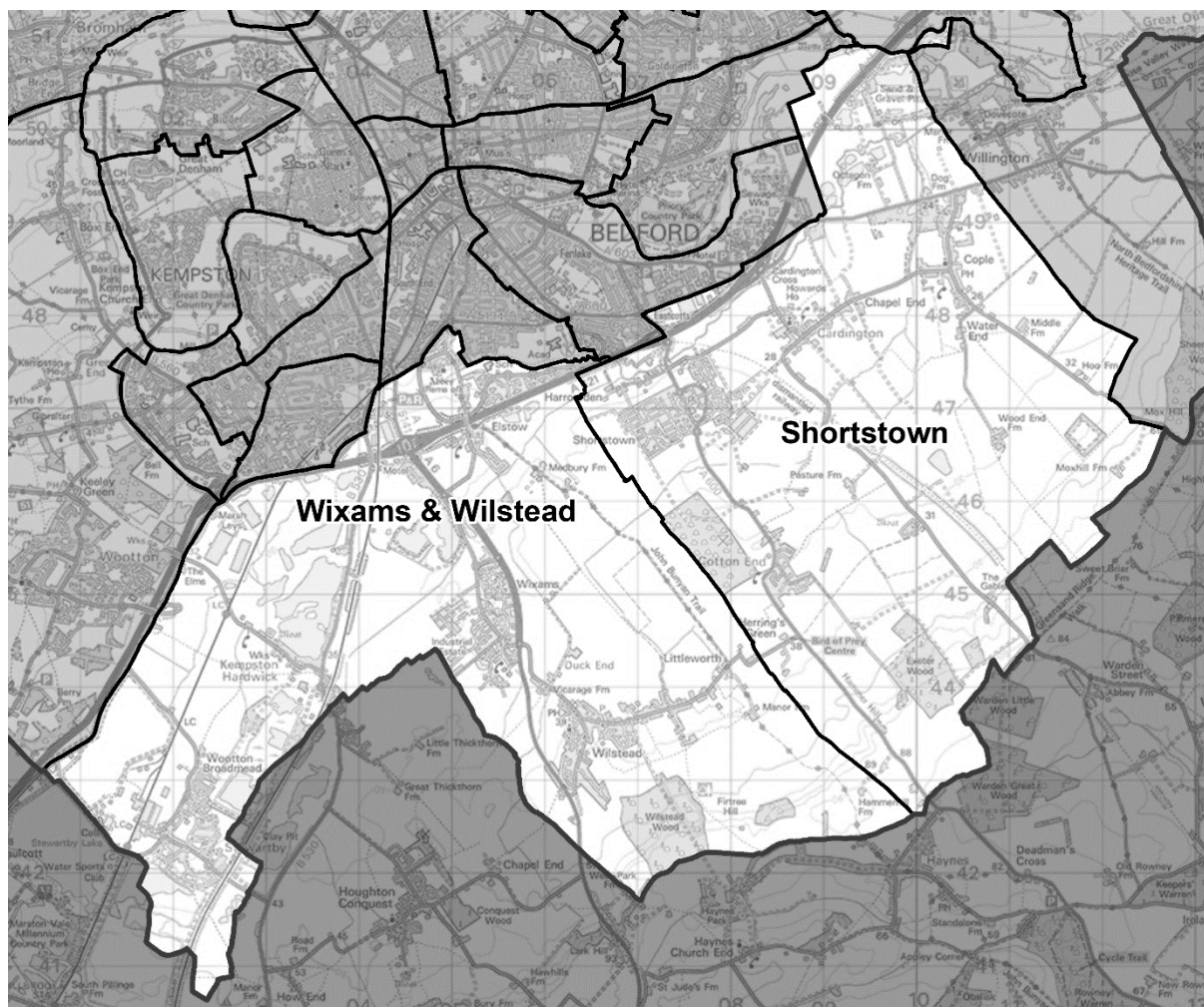
Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Kempston Central & East	2	7%
Kempston North	1	1%
Kempston South	1	0%
Kempston West	1	8%

Kempston Central & East, Kempston North, Kempston South, and Kempston West

55 We received eight submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for Kempston, all but one of which were supportive. These included submissions from two residents, the Conservatives, Labour, Kempston Labour Party, Kempston Town Council, Councillors Kay Burley, Carl Meader, Mohammed Nawaz, Sue Oliver and James Valentine of Bedford Borough Council, and Councillor Ross Purves of Kempston Town Council. The one critical submission was from a resident who

opposed the division of Kempston High Street between Kempston Central & East and Kempston West wards. However, we were not persuaded that sufficient evidence was provided to support any change to the boundaries of these wards. We have therefore confirmed our new draft recommendations as final for the Kempston area.

South Bedford



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Shortstown	2	-10%
Wixams & Wilstead	3	9%

Shortstown and Wixams & Wilstead

56 We received 79 submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for the rural south of the borough, two of which were supportive of the proposals. The vast majority of the submissions opposed dividing Elstow parish between Cauldwell and Wixams & Wilstead wards and, in particular, the inclusion of the historical rural village and most of its conservation area in Cauldwell ward. This included submissions from the Conservatives, Greens, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats, as well as Elstow, Stewartby, Wilshamstead, and Wixams parish councils. We sympathise with these objections and have sought to address them in our final recommendations.

57 The Conservatives again proposed their original scheme for the area, which was composed of a two-councillor Wixams & Wilstead ward incorporating the

parishes of Wixams and Wilshamstead; a two-councillor Elstow, Stewartby & Shortstown ward incorporating Shortstown parish west of the A600 and The Highway, and the parishes of Cotton End, Elstow, and Stewartby; and a single-councillor New Cardington ward incorporating Shortstown parish east of the A600 and The Highway, and the parishes of Cardington and Cople. While we recognise the merits in this scheme, we do not consider we have sufficient evidence to justify splitting Shortstown village between wards. We have therefore not adopted this scheme in our final recommendations.

58 The Greens supported our attempt to distinguish between the more urban and rural areas of Elstow parish but were critical of our execution of this principle in our new draft recommendations. They instead proposed including only the area of Elstow north of West End/Progress Way in Cauldwell ward, owing to its more urban character. They also proposed placing the part of the Abbey Fields estate east of the line between Tewkesbury Road and Halesowen Drive into Kingsbrook ward. While we appreciate that Abbey Fields progresses from Meadowsweet Drive in Kingsbrook ward, we do not consider it appropriate to split this estate down the middle. This scheme also divided our Wixams & Wilstead ward between a proposed Elstow & Stewartby ward comprising the remaining areas of Elstow parish with Stewartby parish, minus electors on Angelica Grove, Borage Walk, and Verbena Gardens which are part of the Wixams development. However, as the Wixams development will eventually cross all three parish boundaries (Elstow, Stewartby, and Wixams), with said parish boundaries running through sites allocated for education, retail, and rail, we do not consider it conducive to effective and convenient local government to separate these parishes between wards.

59 We have therefore not adopted the Green scheme in our final recommendations, though we have adapted the proposed boundary along West End/Progress Way. On our virtual tour of the area, it became clear that the housing north of this major road was considerably different in age and character from the housing to the south, having more in common with the adjacent Interwar housing along Elstow Road than Elstow's historical rural centre. We made a similar assessment of Wadsworth Court. We have therefore redrawn our proposed boundary between Cauldwell and Wixams & Wilstead wards to follow the A5134 West End/Progress Way and the southern edge of Wadsworth Court.

60 We acknowledge that several residents of Hillesden Avenue objected to any of Elstow parish being allocated to Cauldwell ward and that they considered themselves to be part of the Elstow community. We acknowledge these objections but reiterate that it has proved highly difficult to create a scheme of wards which balances our statutory criteria while accommodating all communities' wishes in this area. However, we are now convinced that this pattern of wards offers the best balance available.

61 We also considered the Liberal Democrat proposals in this area which, as elsewhere in the borough, primarily favoured a return to the draft recommendations. However, an alternative was also suggested whereby Elstow, Wilshamstead, and Wixams parishes are grouped together in a three-councillor ward with a variance of 7%, and Kempston Rural, Stewartby, and Wootton are grouped in a three-councillor ward with a variance of -11%, with the anticipation that further development in 2026 will tip the electoral variance to within 10%. However, apart from our earlier observation that the Wixams development will cross the boundaries of Elstow, Stewartby, and Wixams parish boundaries, this proposal appears to add an extra councillor to the scheme. While this may improve the variances for the proposed wards in this area, it would tip electoral variances elsewhere in the borough over 10%.

62 The Liberal Democrat submission also suggested adding Willington parish to our proposed Shortstown ward, reducing the variance from -10% to 1%. While this is an attractive and sensible proposal which conforms to our statutory criteria, it relies on making up for the shortfall in electors in Great Barford ward by combining it with Renhold & Ravensden ward and adding Woodside Park from Brickhill ward. However, we have ruled out moving Woodside Park out of Brickhill ward for reasons detailed in paragraph 42, leaving this proposed Great Barford ward with an electoral variance of -13%. We have therefore not adopted the Liberal Democrat proposals in our final recommendations. While the Labour submission did not make specific warding proposals, it did ask that the warding pattern in this area be reassessed. We have done this and believe we have achieved the best balance of our statutory criteria in our final recommendations.

63 While we considered carefully the concerns of parish councils, and have attempted to resolve these as much as possible in our final recommendations, we did not find the proposals workable. Elstow Parish Council emphasised the positive working relationship between the parish and Stewartby under the existing ward arrangements, and proposed the maintenance of the status quo, whereby both are included in their entirety in a single-councillor ward. However, this would result in a 37% electoral variance, or a -32% variance as a two-councillor ward – neither of which are acceptable in our view. Furthermore, while we appreciate the submission expressed concern over the size of our proposed ward, it also made clear the strong community links between Elstow, Wilshamstead, and Wixams. We believe this makes a clear case for the three parishes to be included in a ward with Stewartby – albeit with the need to move a small part of Elstow parish to Cauldwell ward.

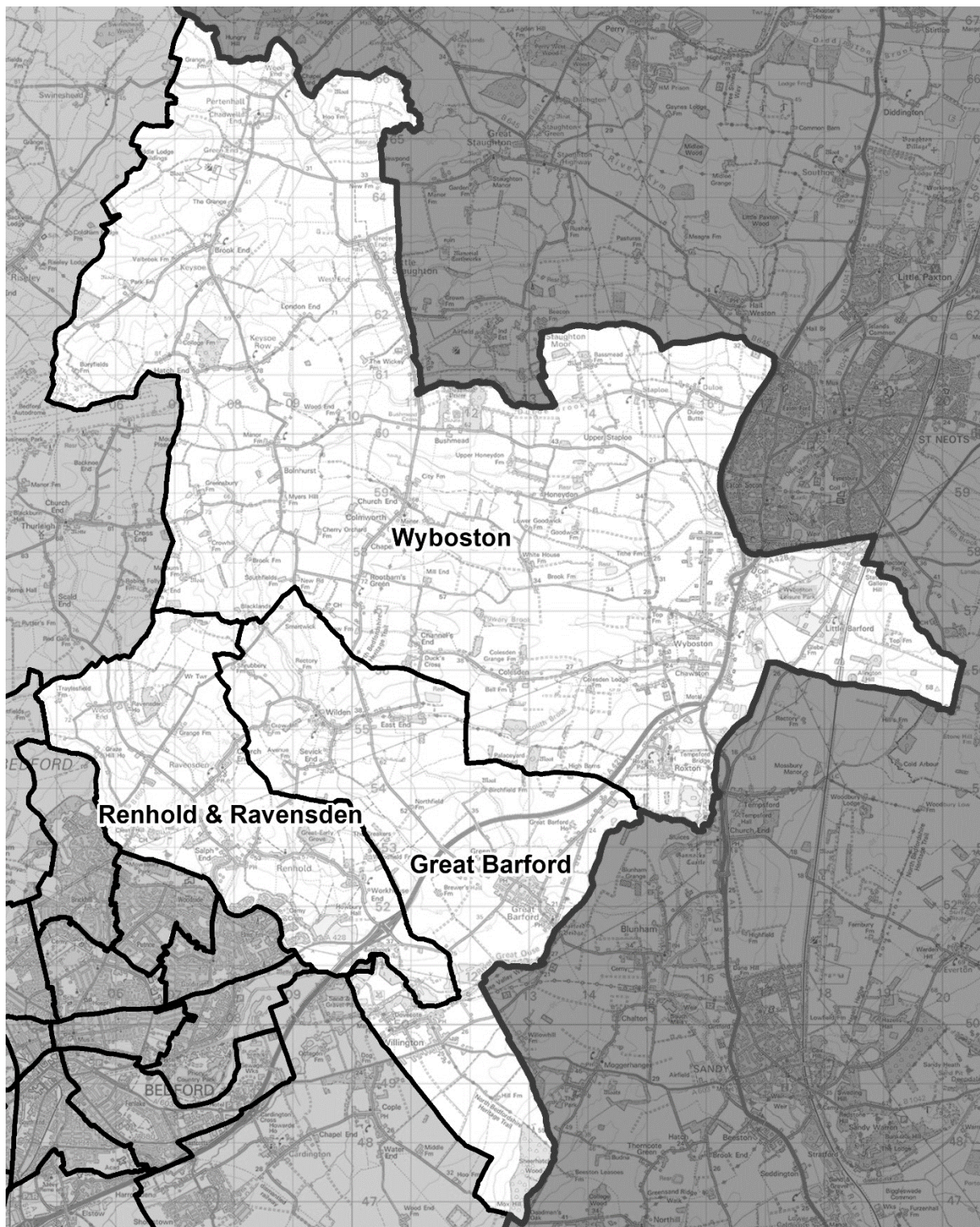
64 Wilshamstead Parish Council made a similar proposal, with the additional alternative of grouping Elstow, Wilshamstead, and Wixams into a ward. However, while this would produce an acceptable variance of -7% in a three-councillor ward, the submission did not address where Stewartby parish might be allocated. The only options would be to add it to Wootton & Kempston Rural ward with the addition of an

extra councillor to the scheme, as in the Liberal Democrat submission, or otherwise completely re-ward the borough. We are not persuaded we have sufficient evidence to make such radical changes to our recommendations.

65 Stewartby Parish Council suggested its boundaries form a ward in its own right on the basis of envisaged development which goes beyond the five-year forecast. However, as previously stated, we cannot consider growth beyond the five-year forecast period, and a single-member ward following the boundaries of Stewartby parish would have a variance of -34% by 2026. Wixams Parish Council made the similar request for a ward following its own boundaries, again on the basis of envisaged growth beyond our forecast period, which would result in variances of 47% for a single-councillor ward or -27% for a two-councillor ward. If this was not possible, the parish requested that it should remain paired with Wilshamstead parish. While this would create an acceptable variance of 4% in a two-councillor ward, it fails to address how the neighbouring parishes ought to be allocated, the difficulties of which are detailed above.

66 We have therefore decided to confirm our new draft recommendations as final, subject to an amendment to the boundary between Wixams & Wilstead and Cauldwell wards.

East Bedford



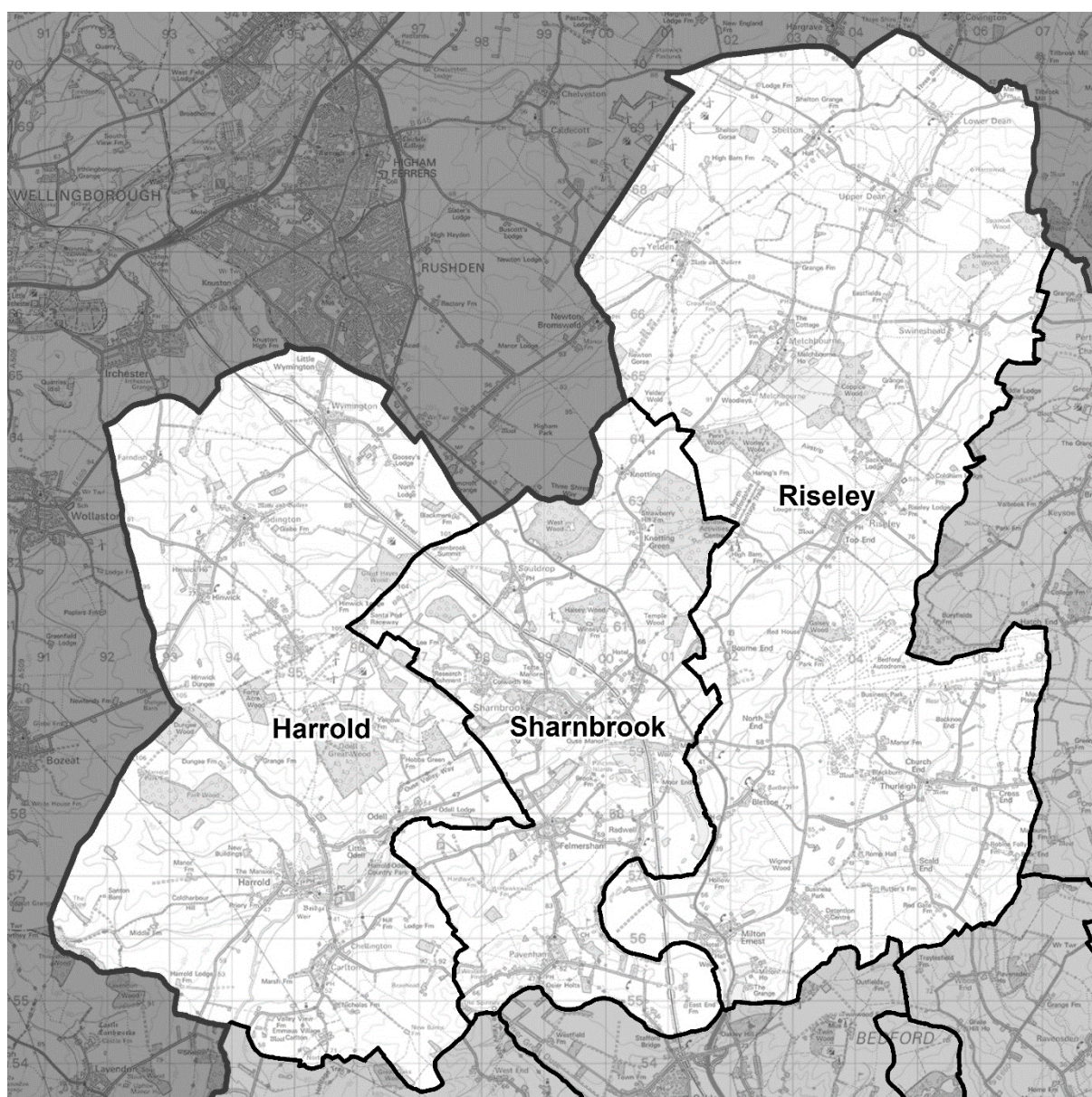
Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Great Barford	1	-2%
Renhold & Ravensden	1	-2%
Wyboston	1	-9%

Great Barford, Renhold & Ravensden, and Wyboston

67 We received six submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for Great Barford. These were from three residents, Great Barford Parish Council, Renhold Parish Council, and the Liberal Democrats. One submission, from a resident, was supportive of the proposals. One resident opposed Wilden parish being moved from Wyboston ward to Great Barford ward. However, removing Wilden parish from Great Barford would leave the ward with a -13% electoral variance. Likewise, a resident from Cople parish expressed a greater affinity with Great Barford and Willington parishes than those in Shortstown ward, and wished to remain in Great Barford ward. Adopting this proposal would result in a high electoral variance of -19% for Shortstown ward.

68 Great Barford Parish Council expressed concern over the ward's representation being reduced from two councillors to one. However, this is because the proposed ward is smaller than the existing ward, and the number of councillors for the ward has been reduced proportionate to the number of electors. The Liberal Democrat proposal, and our reasons for rejecting it, is outlined in paragraph 61. Renhold Parish Council expressed support for our proposed Renhold & Ravensden ward. We have carefully considered the evidence received and have decided to confirm our new draft recommendations for Great Barford, Renhold & Ravensden, and Wyboston wards as final. We consider our proposals provide a fair reflection of community linkages while also ensuring good electoral equality.

North Bedford



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Harrold	1	2%
Riseley	1	-1%
Sharnbrook	1	12%

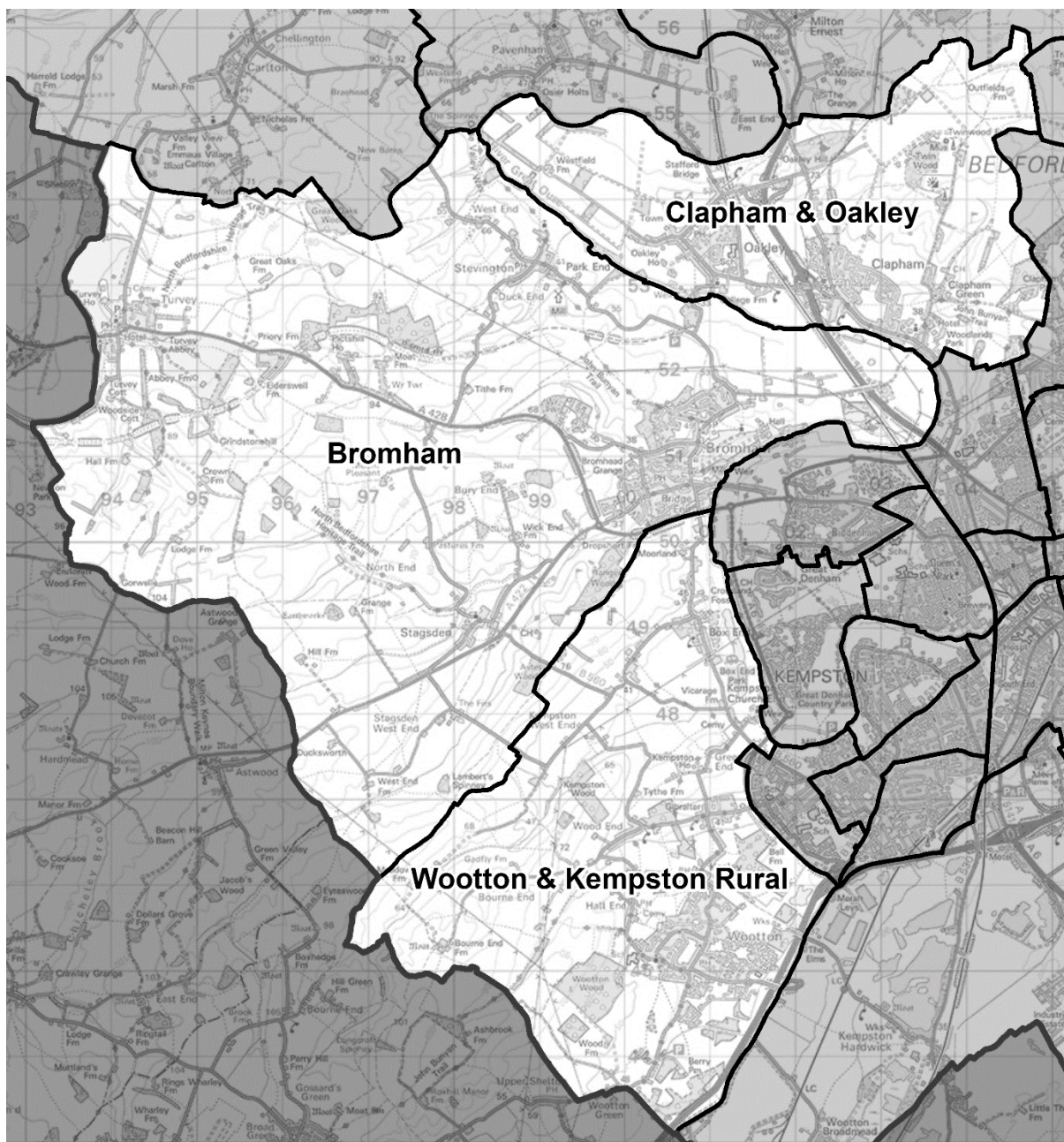
Harrold, Riseley, and Sharnbrook

69 We received seven submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for north Bedford. These were made by four residents, Councillor Doug McMurdo, Knotting & Souldrop Parish Council, and Thurleigh Parish Council. All were supportive of the proposals except those of Knotting & Souldrop Parish Council and Councillor McMurdo, who opposed Knotting & Souldrop's inclusion in Riseley ward. These submissions stated that the parish has nothing in common with parishes in

Riseley ward and has strong historical and contemporary links with Sharnbrook, including a reliance on Sharnbrook services such as the doctor's surgery, shops, post office, schools, and employment sites such as Colworth Park. One resident submission was supportive of Knotting & Souldrop's inclusion in Riseley ward, though this was not supported with evidence.

70 We included Pavenham parish in Sharnbrook ward in our new draft recommendations in response to the parish's desire to be grouped with other small villages, as opposed to the larger villages of Clapham and Oakley. This was supported by two of the resident submissions. However, the effect of this was to push the variance of Sharnbrook ward up to 12%, which led us to move Knotting & Souldrop parish into Riseley ward. Having reflected on the evidence submitted, we are of the opinion that there is a sufficiently strong community interest to justify this variance in balancing our statutory criteria. We are also mindful that there are no large developments planned in the ward and that the general trend in population has been downwards in recent years – meaning the variance may be self-corrective beyond the five-year forecast of this review. Submissions by a resident and Thurleigh Parish Council were supportive of Thurleigh's inclusion in Riseley ward. We have therefore adopted our new draft recommendations for Harrold, Riseley, and Sharnbrook wards in our final recommendations, with the exception that Knotting & Souldrop parish has been included in Sharnbrook ward.

West Bedford



Ward name	Number of councillors	Variance 2026
Bromham	2	1%
Clapham & Oakley	2	-9%
Wootton & Kempston Rural	2	0%

Bromham and Clapham & Oakley

71 We received seven submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for Bromham and Clapham & Oakley wards. These were from six residents and Stevington Parish Council. One submission, from a resident, was supportive of the proposals – specifically the inclusion of Turvey parish in Bromham ward. Four

submissions, including that by Stevington Parish Council, were critical of the parish's inclusion in Bromham ward on account of its small electorate (476 by 2026) relative to that of Bromham parish (4,665 by 2026). The parish council and a resident both suggested Stevington's inclusion in a ward with similarly sized rural parishes, but did not put forward a specific proposal which took account of the wider warding pattern of the borough. While we were sympathetic to these concerns and attempted to create such a grouping within the broader framework of the new draft recommendations, we were unable to identify a viable alternative warding pattern. To accommodate this proposal would therefore require redrawing the entire warding scheme, which is not possible at this stage of the review given the evidence we have received for the borough as a whole. We are therefore content that our new draft recommendations offer the best balance of our statutory criteria in this area and have adopted them in our final recommendations.

Wootton & Kempston Rural

72 We received five submissions in response to our new draft recommendations for Wootton & Kempston Rural ward. These were from three residents, Wootton Parish Council, and Councillor James Weir. The resident submissions and that of the parish council attempted to make the case for the parish to be represented by its own ward, claiming that the electorate forecast for the parish is incorrect and does not take into account planned development. We are not persuaded that the forecast electorate figures are incorrect and, under the forecasts agreed with the Borough Council, a two-councillor Wootton ward as proposed above would have an electoral variance of -15%. The parish council claimed that the 'ongoing and proposed housing developments within the current Wootton ward boundary demonstrate that the Boundary Commission's electorate forecast is demonstrably wrong'. However, we must reiterate that we can only consider planned developments which have a reasonable certainty of completion within five years of the end of this review. We cannot consider aspirations from a neighbourhood plan or developments planned for completion beyond 2026.

73 Having again studied the projections used by Bedford Borough Council to formulate its electorate forecast, we are satisfied that most of the growth Wootton Parish Council details in its submission has already occurred. Our elector totals for Wootton are 4,745 in 2019 and 5,520 in 2026 – a net increase of 775. The development figures provided by Bedford Borough Council project 504 new dwellings and 857 new electors by 2026. This was broken down as 442 new dwellings and 751 new electors between 2019 and 2021 and 62 new dwellings and 105 new electors between 2022 and 2026. The parish council indicated that the parish grew by 504 electors between 2019 and 2020, to 5,249. This is consistent with Bedford Borough Council's forecast of 751 new electors between 2019 and 2021, leaving 247 new electors for 2021. This is also consistent with the general trend of the development, as there are only expected to be 105 new electors

between 2022 and 2026.

74 The parish council also mentioned its neighbourhood plan and that developers have indicated an interest in constructing a potential 105 dwellings identified in the plan. However, as mentioned previously, we cannot base our forecasts on these aspirations, and there is no specific timeline for the building and habitation of these properties. We therefore remain satisfied that the forecast is correct, and have not adopted the parish council's proposal in our final recommendations.

Conclusions

75 The table below provides a summary as to the impact of our final recommendations on electoral equality in Bedford, referencing the 2019 and 2026 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	
	2019	2026
Number of councillors	46	46
Number of electoral wards	28	28
Average number of electors per councillor	2,829	3,237
Number of wards with a variance more than 10% from the average	12	1
Number of wards with a variance more than 20% from the average	4	0

Final recommendations

Bedford Borough Council should be made up of 46 councillors serving 28 wards representing 13 single-councillor wards, 12 two-councillor wards and three 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 Bedford Borough Council. You can also view our final recommendations for Bedford Borough Council on our interactive maps at www.consultation.lgbce.org.uk

Parish electoral arrangements

76 As part of an electoral review, we are required to have regard to the statutory criteria set out in Schedule 2 to the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). The Schedule provides that if a parish is to be divided between different wards it must also be divided into parish wards, so that each parish ward lies wholly within a single ward. We cannot recommend changes to the external boundaries of parishes as part of an electoral review.

77 Under the 2009 Act we only have the power to make changes to parish electoral arrangements where these are as a direct consequence of our recommendations for principal authority warding arrangements. However, Bedford Borough Council has powers under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct community governance reviews to effect changes to parish electoral arrangements.

78 As a result of our proposed ward boundaries and having regard to the statutory criteria set out in schedule 2 to the 2009 Act, we are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Brickhill Parish Council, Elstow Parish Council, Kempston Town Council, and Kempston Rural Parish Council.

79 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Brickhill parish.

Final recommendations

Brickhill Parish Council should comprise 15 councillors, as at present, representing five wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
East	4
North	4
South	2
West	3
Woodlands Park	2

80 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Elstow parish.

Final recommendations

Elstow Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Village	6
Progress Way	3

81 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Kempston parish.

Final recommendations

Kempston Town Council should comprise 12 councillors, as at present, representing four wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Central & East	5
North	3
South	2

West

2

82 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Kempston Rural parish.

Final recommendations

Kempston Rural Parish Council should comprise nine councillors, as at present, representing two wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
The Ends	3
Wilkinson	6

What happens next?

83 We have now completed our review of Bedford 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 2023.

Equalities

84 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 Bedford Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2026)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Biddenham	1	1,869	1,869	-34%	2,935	2,935	-9%
2	Brickhill	2	6,680	3,340	18%	6,744	3,372	4%
3	Bromham	2	5,722	2,861	1%	6,534	3,267	1%
4	Castle & Newnham	2	5,619	2,810	-1%	6,175	3,088	-5%
5	Cauldwell	3	7,925	2,642	-7%	9,787	3,262	1%
6	Clapham & Oakley	2	5,304	2,652	-6%	5,890	2,945	-9%
7	De Parys	2	5,114	2,557	-10%	6,085	3,043	-6%
8	Goldington	2	5,977	2,989	6%	6,119	3,060	-5%
9	Great Barford	1	2,701	2,701	-5%	3,158	3,158	-2%
10	Great Denham	1	2,787	2,787	-1%	3,203	3,203	-1%
11	Greyfriars	1	2,579	2,579	-9%	3,468	3,468	7%
12	Harpur	2	6,077	3,039	7%	7,010	3,505	8%

Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2026)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
13 Harrold	1	3,231	3,231	14%	3,312	3,312	2%
14 Kempston Central & East	2	6,779	3,390	20%	6,917	3,459	7%
15 Kempston North	1	3,218	3,218	14%	3,279	3,279	1%
16 Kempston South	1	3,230	3,230	14%	3,249	3,249	0%
17 Kempston West	1	2,981	2,981	5%	3,491	3,491	8%
18 Kingsbrook	2	7,059	3,530	25%	7,070	3,535	9%
19 Putnoe	2	6,634	3,317	17%	6,685	3,343	3%
20 Queens Park	3	6,157	2,052	-27%	8,981	2,994	-8%
21 Renhold & Ravensden	1	2,975	2,975	5%	3,164	3,164	-2%
22 Riseley	1	3,196	3,196	13%	3,200	3,200	-1%
23 Riverfield	1	2,891	2,891	2%	2,917	2,917	-10%
24 Sharnbrook	1	3,125	3,125	10%	3,622	3,622	12%
25 Shortstown	2	4,374	2,187	-23%	5,838	2,919	-10%
26 Wixams & Wilstead	3	7,296	2,432	-14%	10,634	3,545	9%
27 Wootton & Kempston Rural	2	5,729	2,865	1%	6,504	3,252	0%

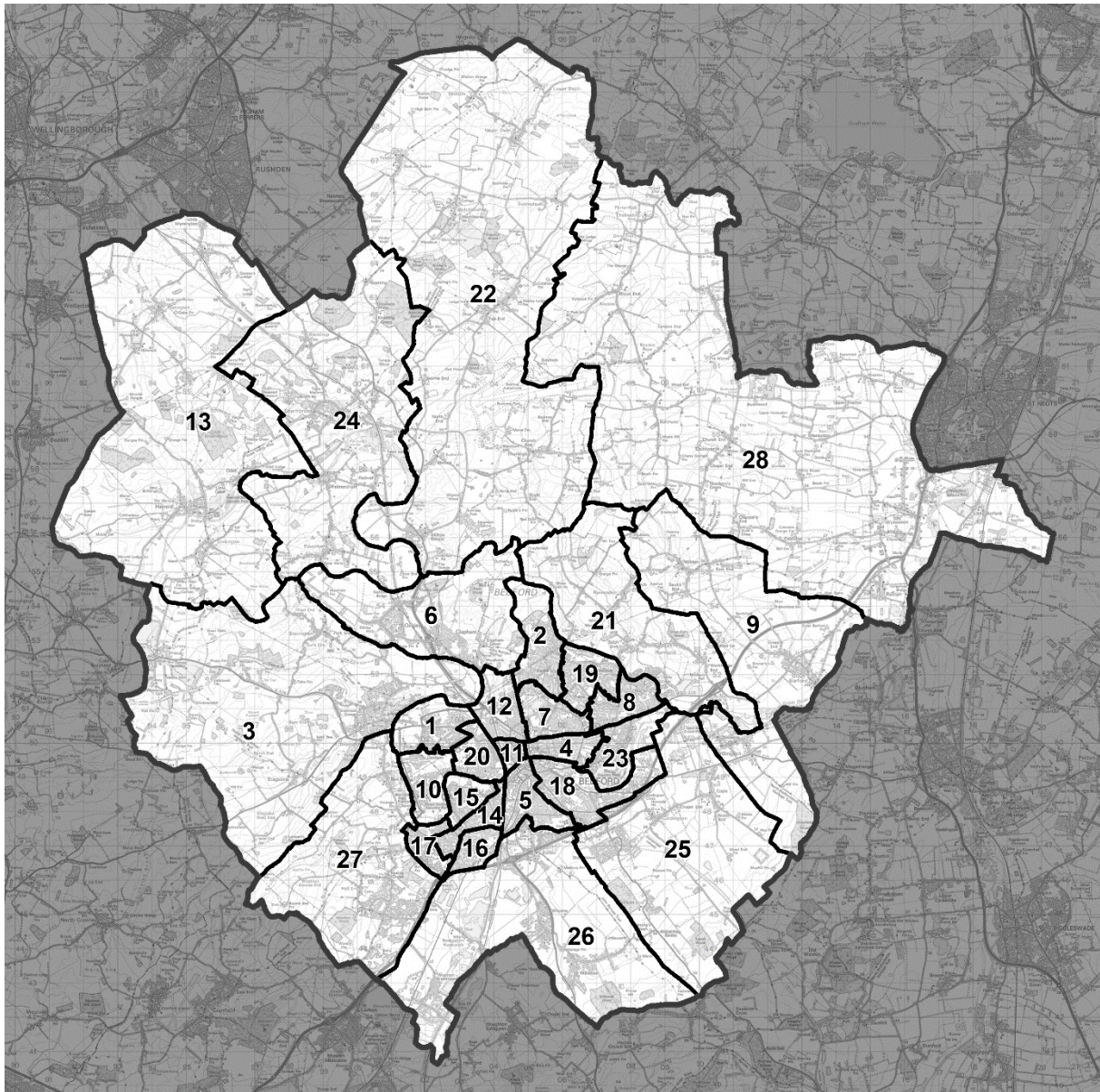
Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2019)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2026)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
28 Wyboston	1	2,902	2,902	3%	2,950	2,950	-9%
Totals	46	130,131	-	-	148,921	-	-
Averages	-	-	2,829	-	-	3,237	-

Source: Electorate figures are based on information provided by Bedford 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



Number	Ward name
1	Biddenham
2	Brickhill
3	Bromham
4	Castle & Newnham
5	Cauldwell
6	Clapham & Oakley
7	De Parys
8	Goldington
9	Great Barford
10	Great Denham

11	Greyfriars
12	Harpur
13	Harrold
14	Kempston Central & East
15	Kempston North
16	Kempston South
17	Kempston West
18	Kingsbrook
19	Putnoe
20	Queens Park
21	Renhold & Ravensden
22	Riseley
23	Riverfield
24	Sharnbrook
25	Shortstown
26	Wixams & Wilstead
27	Wootton & Kempston Rural
28	Wyboston

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/bedfordshire/bedford

Appendix C

Submissions received

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

Political Groups

- Bedford & Kempston Conservative Association
- Bedford Borough Conservative Councillor Group
- Bedford Borough Council Labour Group
- Bedford Borough Council Liberal Democrats Group
- Bedford Green Party
- Kempston Labour Party
- North Bedfordshire Liberal Democrats Party

Councillors

- Councillor S. Blacklaws (Kempston Town Council)
- Councillor K. Burley (Bedford Borough Council)*
- Councillor G. Coombes (Bedford Borough Council)
- Councillor A. Hare (Elstow Parish Council)
- Councillor T. Hill (Bedford Borough Council)
- Councillor M. Masud (Bedford Borough Council)
- Councillor D. McMurdo (Bedford Borough Council)
- Councillor C. Meader (Bedford Borough Council)
- Councillor J. Miles (Elstow Parish Council)
- Councillor M. Nawaz (Bedford Borough Council)*
- Councillor S. Oliver (Bedford Borough Council)*
- Councillor R. Purves (Kempston Town Council)
- Councillor J. Sampson (Bedford Borough Council)
- Councillor J. Valentine (Bedford Borough Council)*
- Councillor J. Weir (Bedford Borough Council)

* Represented in a single submission.

Local Organisations

- Faith in Queens Park

Parish and Town Councils

- Elstow Parish Council
- Great Barford Parish Council
- Kempston Town Council
- Knotting & Souldrop Parish Council
- Renhold Parish Council
- Stevington Parish Council
- Stewartby Parish Council
- Thurleigh Parish Council
- Wilshamstead Parish Council
- Wixams Parish Council
- Wootton Parish Council

Local Residents

- 169 local residents

Petitions

- 'Reverse the proposal to split Elstow Parish into two different council wards' – 56 signatures, submitted by Councillor T. Hill.

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 fairness	When one elector's vote is worth the same as another's
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. For the purposes of this report, we refer specifically to the electorate for local government elections
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 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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