



Labour Party (Letchworth and Baldock Branch)
5 London Road
Baldock
SG7 6LE

Review Officer (North Hertfordshire)
LGBCE
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Blyth
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23 December 2022

To The Review Officer,

As the Letchworth & Baldock Branch of the Labour Party we value this opportunity to respond to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's draft recommendations on the future electoral boundaries for North Hertfordshire.

As a local branch, we are closely connected to the communities within Letchworth & Baldock and the surrounding villages. We regularly arrange member and community canvassing events, knocking on doors - both urban and rural. Our membership supports a number of local charities, schools and community events and as a local Party we support our member's community activities where we can. We support eight Labour Councillors from both Letchworth and Baldock on North Hertfordshire Council, connecting them to casework and keeping them abreast of the concerns of local residents. Labour Councillors are amongst the most active in the community and know well the issues residents face accessing Council services.

We were particularly pleased to see the Commission's recommendations for the boundary arrangements in Letchworth which aligned closely with those proposed by the Labour Party. We believe this solution follows the natural communities more closely, and will facilitate effective community support by local Councillors.

We are deeply concerned at the handling of the new developments in Baldock and the resulting boundary proposals for Baldock and Ashwell & Weston and echo the Council's objections. Not only do the proposed boundaries divide communities, it is difficult to see how councillors could effectively serve residents' needs over such a large area and with vastly different needs. The meeting load alone would leave scarce time to do the actual job of being a Councillor.

We have reviewed the Council response and are able to offer it our full support. We include here for your reference, the information that our members prepared to help inform the North East Herts CLP position.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Daniel Allen
Chair, Letchworth and Baldock Branch
Vice Chair, North Hertfordshire Council

Cc: Councillor Alistair Willoughby, Chair of North East Hertfordshire Constituency Labour Party

Baldock wards and Ashwell & Weston

The NE Herts CLP agrees with North Herts Council and is particularly concerned about the proposals put forward by the LGBCE for Baldock and Ashwell & Weston.

We do support the decision of the LGBCE to maintain the majority of the existing southern, western and northern boundaries of Baldock Town, but we are concerned about the Commission's approach to accommodating the expansion of Baldock into the rural parishes of Bygrave and Clothall and the resulting boundary proposals for Ashwell & Weston, Baldock East and Baldock Town wards. These new developments will be urban in nature and residents will identify as being part of Baldock. They should not be located in a new rural 'super-ward' but with their natural communities in Baldock East and Baldock Town.

Our concerns are:

- The proposed 'super-ward' of Ashwell & Weston will fail 2,100 urban residents. Inclusion in a new rural 'super-ward' will divide the urban residents from their community in Baldock.
- The proposed ward will also fail rural residents. The population of the ward will be concentrated in the new Baldock developments that are being built in areas of Bygrave & Clothall parishes. As a result, the ward will be dominated by residents who will identify as being from Baldock and are serviced by Baldock's schools, shops, pubs and transport links.
- The proposed Ashwell & Weston ward is too large to be effective and convenient, with 11 separate parish areas to represent. Given the necessity for district Councillors to attend parish councils, meetings and events, many of which take place in the evenings, the proposed warding would require Councillors to potentially travel the length and breadth of a large rural ward on multiple occasions each week. Current Councillors report that their wards, with up to 7 parish areas, can already be hard work to manage and consider that increasing this to 11 would be unviable and lead to worse representation for local communities.
- The LGBCE also says that the alternative proposed by the Council is not feasible since it would involve the creation of parish wards that would have an insufficient electorate in 2024. In fact, this is not the case. The population of the potential "Baldock Ward" of Bygrave Parish is currently 16% of the total population of Bygrave parish which would allow a Parish Council of five to have four members from a Bygrave Ward and one from a Baldock Ward.
- The challenge of unviable parish wards with low/no electors, including in areas with no parish council, must be navigated. The goal of achieving good governance in parishes should not diminish good governance at district level.



In the first instance, we recommend that the Commission take up North Herts Council's proposal which enjoys cross-party support and we believe to be the best solution to represent both the residents of Baldock and the rural northern parishes.

If it remains the view of the Commission that the Council's proposal is not viable, we propose an alternative for consideration, 'Baldock East, Bygrave & Clothall'. This ward would include the existing Baldock East, the entirety of Bygrave parish and the Baldock developments within Clothall parish (which does not have a Council or elections).

This option would ensure electoral parity and remove any need to adjust parish boundaries. The new Baldock East, Bygrave and Clothall ward would become a two member ward and Baldock Town ward would remain a three member ward. The remainder of Arbury and Weston & Sandon wards would remain single-member wards. We believe this option to be less ideal than the Council's proposal but do believe it would better protect the interests of both urban and rural residents and be more closely aligned to the statutory criteria than the Commission's proposal.

The village of Bygrave, while distinct, is close to Baldock East and is connected to Baldock via a string of houses along Ashwell Road. The village has a population of ~300, limited services of its own, and is dependent on Baldock for all facilities.

The inclusion of part of Clothall parish would ensure that the 200+ home development of Baldock would be located appropriately.

This is much more pragmatic than creating a super-ward and much closer to the original NHC proposal. This may also negate the need to modify the Baldock Town & Baldock East A505 boundary near the Salisbury Road and Bygrave Road areas.

This is not a perfect solution, but it does ensure that the needs of a greater number of people are met and that the rural parishes and urban wards are, for the most, achieving effective representation.

Reviewing the data, we believe this would result in:

Baldock:

- Baldock West (Town) using the NHC proposed boundary (not the revised one the LGBCE used) and including the development site from Clothall: 6,100 electors, three councillors, -6% variance.
- Baldock East, Bygrave & Clothall including the development site from Clothall: 4,364 electors, two councillors, +8% variance.

Northern rural parishes:

- Arbury Ward: Hinxworth, Ashwell, Caldecote, Newnham, Radwell. 2,052 electors, one councillor, -7.2% variance
- Sandon and Weston: Sandun, Wallington, Weston, Clothall and Rushden. 2,439 electors, one councillor, +10.3%.

Letchworth

The NE Herts CLP endorses the Commission's proposals for Letchworth and believes this provides the best option for both recognising the distinct communities of Letchworth and achieving good electoral balance. We do propose a small amendment for the benefit of 12 electors.

The railway line is a firm boundary between the north and south of Letchworth and it is entirely appropriate to use it as a basis for boundary divisions across the town. This also provides a more natural division than the current arrangements in Letchworth East - which crosses the tracks - which we support.

The Commission proposals retain all existing communities without any inappropriate division, both north and south of the railway. They not only respect the main established communities of Wilbury, the Grange, Westbury, Jackmans and Old Pixmore (the area to the east of Norton Way South), but also the smaller communities within the Garden City, such as Norton village, the area around Nevells Road between the Common and the Railway, the small estate between Wilbury Road and the Pix Brook, (Longmead, Haymoor, Hawthorn Hill and Wheat Hill), and Willian Village.

The proposed wards are also well adapted to the major new developments which are being planned, north of the Grange, east of Kristiansand Way and the redevelopment of the town centre.

Letchworth South East and Letchworth South West wards

We endorse the Commission's proposal for the southern Letchworth wards as the two three-member wards will provide better electoral equality, better represent established communities and support stronger governance. As discussed, this option would provide 3% and 2% more electors than the district average by 2028, well below the 10% tolerance. It also ensures that Pixmore Junior School and The Crescent are rejoined with their natural community in the current Letchworth East ward. It also avoids dividing the Lordship area or placing areas of it in a ward collocated with the Jackmans. While the Jackmans is distinct, it has much more in common with Letchworth East ward, particularly in terms of use of Council



services and councillor casework. The Lordship has distinct needs, much more in common with those in the west of Letchworth.

Letchworth Wilbury, Letchworth Norton and Letchworth Grange wards:

We endorse the Commission's proposal for the northern ward as three two-member wards. The boundaries reflect the natural boundary divisions between the established Grange, Wilbury and Norton communities.

The Grange is a distinct community grounded in the Grange estate. The creation of Letchworth Norton more accurately reflects the nature of these communities than the current Letchworth East/Letchworth Grange boundaries. We note the impact of Norton Common as a natural boundary between the proposed Norton and Wilbury wards. Further, we endorse the Commission's adoption of the Conservative proposal to include residents north of Wilbury road in Wilbury rather than the Grange for the reasons cited. We also support the Commission's decision on Cowslip Hill given the benefits for electoral equality.

Minor amendment:

We propose that the 12 electors living in the area north of Wilbury Road between the Pix Brook and Stotfold Road be transferred from the Grange to Wilbury, as such links as they have are with Wilbury rather than the Grange.

Appendix A: Statistical analysis for Baldock

PROVISIONAL DATA ANALYSIS BY LABOUR PARTY VOLUNTEER

A. Support the LGBCE proposal:

This would be bad for about 2,100 electors in the new developments. Meanwhile it would be addressed by a Community Governance Review and sorted out at the next boundary review in c. 15 years' time.

It's not a good option, but possible.

B. Propose a 2-member Baldock East and Bygrave ward (reducing Ashwell & Weston to 2-members):



Transfers 1,650 electors in 2028 from the Ashwell & Weston ward to BE&B. So BE&B forecast electorate in 2028 is $2,057 + 1,650 = 3,707$.

If it were a 2-member ward the $3,707 / 2,210 / 2 - 1 = -16.1\%$ electoral equality in 2028.

This is not a viable option.

C. Propose a 2-member Baldock East, Bygrave and Radwell ward.

Transfers another 108 in relative to B. The forecast electorate in 2028 is $3,707 + 108 = 3,815$ so electoral equality is $3,815 / 2,210 / 2 - 1 = -13.7\%$ in 2028.

Geographically odd, not feasible.

D. Propose a 2-member Baldock East, Bygrave, Radwell and Newnham ward:

Adds another 68 and so $3,815 + 68 = 3,883$ and electoral equality in 2028 is $3,883 / 2,210 / 2 - 1 = -12.1\%$.

Still not viable.

E. Propose a 2-member Baldock East, Bygrave, Caldecote, Radwell and Newnham ward.

That only adds another 11 and by now the ward is very large geographically.

Still not good enough for electoral variance.

F. Backtrack (to B above) and add Clothall to B to propose a 2-member Baldock East, Bygrave and Clothall ward.

That adds another 834 in 2028 so forecast electorate in 2028 is $3,707$ (from B) $+ 834 = 4,541$. Electoral equality in 2028 is $4,541 / 2,210 / 2 - 1 = +2.7\%$.

If we take those wards out of Ashwell & Weston its forecast electorate in 2028 becomes $6,797 - 1,650 - 834 = 4,313$ and electoral equality in 2028 is $4,313 / 2,210 / 2 - 1 = -2.4\%$. This seems to have some merit.



Who is it good for? The 2,057 current Baldock East and the c. $1,424 + 712 = 2,136$ new developments if near Baldock itself = 4,193 will be happy. The rural residents (c. 348 in Bygrave and Clothall combined) will be less so. Under this proposal Ashwell & Weston would reduce from 3-members to 2-members.

Our view is that option F is a better option than A.

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS ON BALDOCK EAST, BYGRAVE AND CLOTHALL

- Baldock West (Town) using NHC proposed boundary (not the revised one the LGBCE used) and including the development site from Clothall: 6,100 electors, 3 Cllrs, -6% variance.

- Baldock East & Bygrave, including the development site from Clothall: 4,364 electors, 2 Cllrs, +8% variance.

- That leaves the rural parishes. A single ward with all of them would have 4,491 electors, 2 Cllrs, +1% variance. It obviously relies on them agreeing the new developments in Clothall being part of Baldock. This might be better split into two to allow better community representation (Hinxworth, Ashwell, Caldecote, Newnham, Radwell - Arbury ward - 2,052 electors, 1 Cllr, -7.2% variance) and (Sandon, Wallington, Weston, Clothall and Rushden - Weston & Sandon ward - 2,439 electors, 1 Cllr, +10.3%).

So, looking at the numbers, it might work numerically if the LGBCE agrees to the Clothall developments being included in Baldock and with a variance of 10% in Weston & Sandon.

END OF SUBMISSION

North Hertfordshire District Council

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Comment text:

Please find attached the feedback on the draft recommendations for North Hertfordshire from the Letchworth & Baldock branch of the local Labour Party. Cllr Daniel Allen Vice Chair North Hertfordshire Council / Chair Letchworth & Baldock branch - Labour Party

Uploaded Documents:

Download (https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/download_document?file=draft%2F1672311840_North+Herts+Boundary+Review+-+Letchworth+%26+Baldock+branch+submission.pdf)