

# Oxfordshire

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## Comment text:

Please see attached

## Attached Documents:

- lgbce report - oxfordshire - wantage town council submission.pdf

## Wantage Town Council Response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England report on Oxfordshire

Wantage Town Council (The Council) has discussed the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (The Commission) draft recommendations for 'New electoral arrangements for Oxfordshire County Council' [https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/full\\_report\\_oxfordshire.pdf](https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-10/full_report_oxfordshire.pdf). The Council agreed, at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023 to suggest to the Commission alternative proposals for Wantage and the Southern part of the Vale of White Horse.

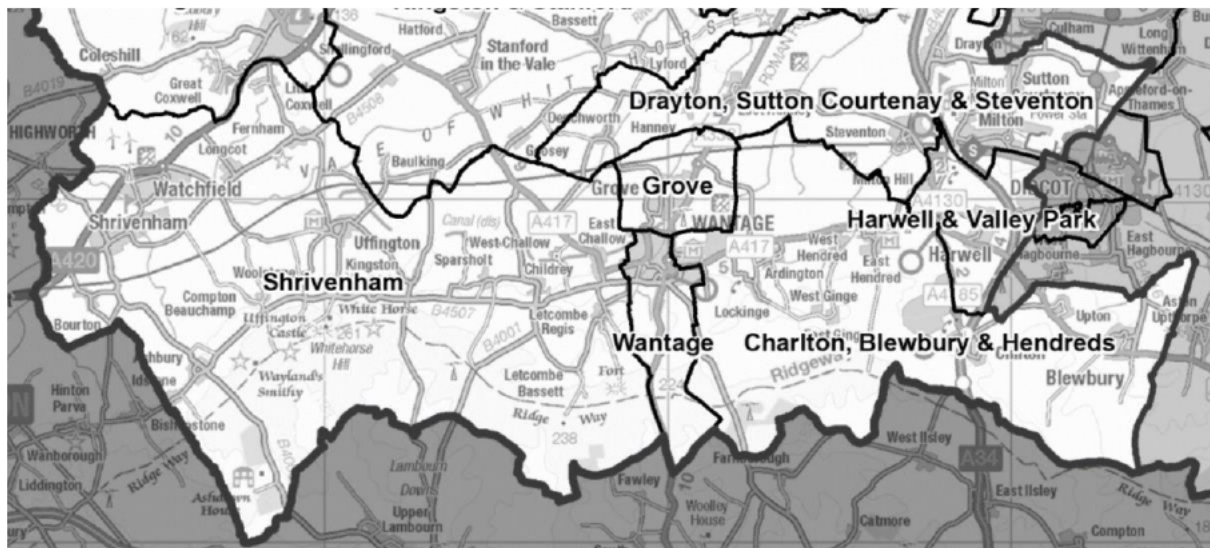
### General observations

The Council understands that the report is primarily about the number of County Councillors and that the proposed number of County Councillors has all party agreement. We do not seek to challenge that however we do wish to challenge the the shape of the electoral divisions in Wantage and the Southern part of Vale of White Horse.

The Council understands that a balance must be struck between the three major criteria for electoral divisions namely Electoral equality, Community identity and Effective and convenient local government. The report further states that divisions should be based on strong, easily identifiable boundaries.

The Council had not seen the detailed proposals by The Commission earlier in 2023 and having studied the Commission proposals it is concerned that these do not reflect the importance of community identity, geographic connections and transport links in Wantage in particular and the southern part of the Vale of White Horse in general.

For Wantage as a town with a strong cultural identity the proposed OCC electoral divisions take a significant area (Charlton and the connected and developing Kingsgrove estate) out of of Wantage and place it in a geographically large and diverse Charlton, Blewbury, and Hendreds division which extends from within Wantage to a point beyond the eastern edge of Didcot. This is particularly clear in the extract from the map on page 20 of the report the six divisions in the Southern part of the Vale of White Horse.



In summary The Council is clear that the proposals affecting Wantage fail on two of the key criteria namely Community identity and Effective and convenient local government. We believe that this is also the case for several others of the proposed divisions. We explain our view in the detailed

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sections below. We also believe that in relation to Wantage the proposed divisions fail on the test of having strong, easily identifiable boundaries.

### **Our suggested Electoral Boundaries in the Southern Vale**

Taking the six proposed electoral divisions in turn we make the following alternative proposals which address the main criteria of Electoral Quality, Community identity and Effective and convenient local government.

#### **Shrivenham**

As proposed in the report Shrivenham has poor electoral equality with a variance of +13% and poor community coherence between its western end and the eastern end adjacent to Wantage. We propose that East and West Challow, which are close to and significantly contiguous with Wantage due to an arc of new housing in West Challow around the east of Wantage, should be moved from Shrivenham to Wantage. This would improve the electoral equality in Shrivenham to give a variance of -1% which for a geographically large division will be more manageable for a single Councillor.

#### **Wantage West (renamed from Wantage)**

Wantage as a whole is a readily identifiable community with strong geographical, and cultural links with the surrounding area. We have already suggested moving East and West Challow into a Wantage West division (see above). In order to balance the Electoral equality of Wantage West we suggest that the existing Wantage 3 (Charlton) polling district be removed into a proposed Charlton, Ardington and Hendreds division and that Grove 2 (Grove Brook) polling district be added to the Wantage West division. Grove Brook shares its geographic, community, and transport links with both Wantage and Grove and contains the health centre which serves both communities, so we do not see this as problematic. These changes create a coherent community for a County Councillor to represent.

#### **Grove**

The report gives Grove its own County Councillor, which is logical for this growing community, however our suggestion to place Grove Brook into the Wantage division creates electoral inequality. We note that Grove has strong ties to the neighbouring villages of East and West Hanney and further north to Goosey and Denchworth, ties that are much stronger than between these four villages and the rest of the Drayton, Sutton Courtenay and Steventon division in which the Commission proposals place them. We therefore propose that these four polling districts become part of Grove division. This creates a coherent division on geographic and community criteria with a variance of +12% which we believe is acceptable for a coherent and relatively compact electoral division.

#### **Charlton, Ardington and Hendreds (renamed from Charlton, Blewbury and Hendreds)**

We have already expressed our concern that placing the Charlton area of Wantage into a Division that stretches from within Wantage to a point east of Didcot will unhelpfully divide the focus of its County Councillor. To produce a more coherent division with better cultural, geographic and transport coherence we propose that the Upton and Blewbury polling districts be removed from the western end of the division and added to a new Harwell, Valley Park and Blewbury division (see below). To balance the electoral equality and increase the community coherence of the division we propose that Wantage 3 (Charlton) polling district be added from Wantage West (see above). We also suggest that Chilton 1&2 polling districts remain in this division even though this increases the variance to +8% as these have coherence with the Harwell Campus which should also remain in the division.

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### Drayton, Sutton Courtenay and Steventon

Our suggested removal of East and West Hanney, Goosey and Denchworth from this division (see Grove above), whilst improving the geographic coherence of both this division and Grove, reduces its electoral equality. This can be balanced by including Milton No.2 (Heights) in the division alongside Milton No.1 (Village) thus maintaining its variance at 0%.

### Harwell, Valley Park and Blewbury (renamed from Hartwell and Valley Park)

This division sits to the west and south of Didcot with which it has strong and developing links although Didcot is in South Oxfordshire District. We are suggesting that Upton and Blewbury polling districts are included in the division giving good electoral equality. These areas are distant from Wantage, and transport links are generally towards Didcot. This raises an apparent problem in that the Harwell and Valley Park section is not contiguous with the Upton and Blewbury section although both parts look significantly towards Didcot in terms of community and geography. We believe that in practice this will not be an issue for a single County Councillor as the two parts are only separated by a narrow arm of South Oxfordshire (2/3 mile on the A417) which has relatively few electors. We considered as an alternative proposal to include Chilton in the division but rejected that as it reduced the electoral equality substantially to a variance of +16% which we believe is unacceptable – this is largely due to the projected growth of housing in the new Valley Park Parish.

### Electoral Quality

The table below summarises the effect of our proposals on Electoral Quality in the six divisions in the southern Vale of White Horse. It demonstrates that our proposals reduce the number of divisions with a variance from the Oxfordshire average of over 10% from 5 (Report p27 para. 86) to 4. Also, with regard to the 6 divisions we have addressed in this submission, the standard deviation of electors from the Oxfordshire average reduces to 488 electors compared to the Commission's 716.

Division	Electors	Variance from Oxfordshire average
Charlton, Ardington and Hendreds	9097	8%
Drayton, Sutton Courtney and Steventon	8489	0%
Grove	9428	12%
Harwell, Valley Park and Blewbury	8585	2%
Shrivenham	8387	-1%
Wantage West	8290	-2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>52276</b>	
<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>488</b>	
<b>Oxfordshire average</b>	<b>8449</b>	

### Parish electoral arrangements for Wantage

Finally, as regards Wantage Town Council, the report para 87 page 27 states that the LGBCE must also make alterations to parish wards where these fall across the new OCC electoral division boundaries. Whilst we understand the principle behind creation of a new ward within Wantage Parish, we fail to



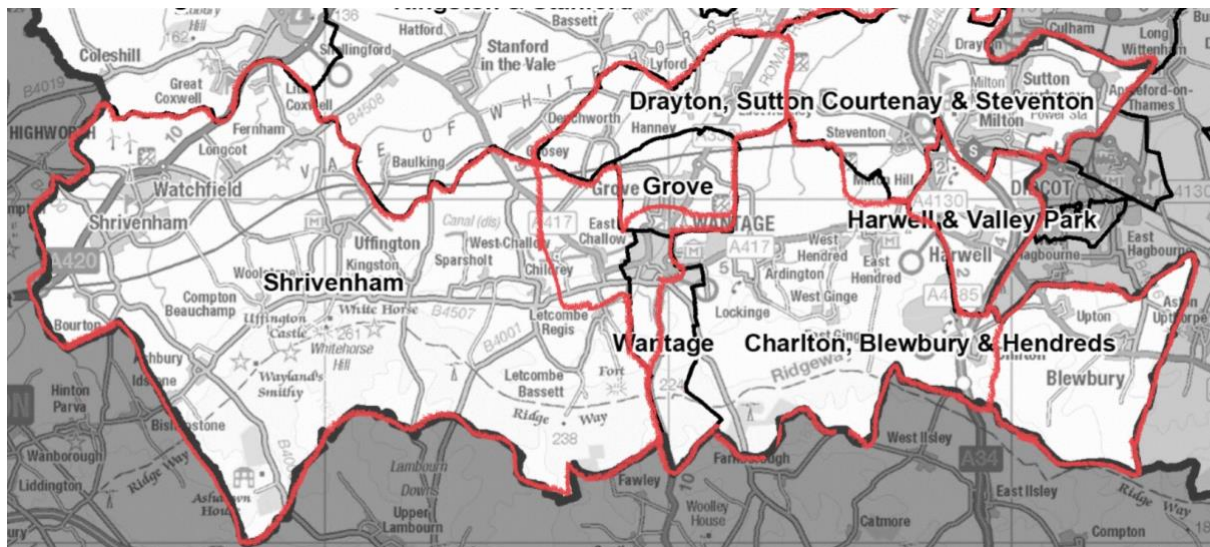
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understand either the overall number (29) of Councillors suggested for Wantage or the breakdown by Ward (see para 96 of the report). At best this can be seen as an error but we are concerned that it reflects a lack of understanding of our locality. We are of the view that the current number of 16 Councillors in Wantage remains appropriate and that any changes are a matter for the Vale of White Horse District Council.

### **In Summary**

We believe that we have demonstrated that our amendments to the Commission's proposals will improve all three of the statutory criteria to which the Commission must adhere. In particular from the perspective of Wantage Town Council they allow for more effective interaction between Wantage Town Council and those County Councillors representing the area thus providing more convenient local government for Wantage and also for the neighbouring community of Grove.

The following map shows the revised boundaries of the six divisions in the southern Vale of White Horse if our proposals were implemented.



Communicated to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on 06/12/23

Document submitted by: Julia Evans, Town Clerk, Wantage Town Council, [REDACTED]

Document prepared by: Iain Cameron, Wantage Town Councillor and Deputy-Mayor [REDACTED]