

Meeting Council

Date 14 December 2022



ELECTORAL REVIEW OF THE BOROUGH OF STEVENAGE – FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To note that an Electoral Review of the Borough of Stevenage has been undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), with the final recommendations of the review now published. These recommendations make changes to all Wards in the Borough of Stevenage.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the contents of the report be noted.
- 2.2 That the Council notes that a Polling District and Polling Places review will be undertaken in the summer of 2023.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Electoral Reviews undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England look at whether the boundaries of wards or divisions within a local authority need to be altered. These reviews are conducted

either to ensure fairer representation at local government elections after any significant changes in the distribution of electors, or at the request of a local authority for other reasons.

- 3.2 Stevenage Borough Council had not been reviewed since 1998. The Commission has a duty to review all local authorities in England “from time to time”, and every authority which has not been reviewed for 20 years are being prioritised and added to their programme of reviews. Furthermore, the Council met the Commission’s criteria for electoral inequality with four wards out of 13 (31%) having a variance of more than 10%. These were Bedwell, Longmeadow, Old Town and Woodfield Wards. The table below provides the Ward data of Stevenage highlighting these variances:

Electoral Variance by Ward

Ward Name	No. Councillors	Electorate*	Variance*
Bandle Hill	3	5,184	3%
Bedwell	3	5,633	12%
Chells	3	5,038	0%
Longmeadow	3	4,485	-11%
Manor	3	5,097	1%
Martins Wood	3	4,636	-8%
Old Town	3	6,433	28%
Pin Green	3	4,803	-4%
Roebuck	3	5,140	2%
Shephall	3	4,598	-9%
St Nicholas	3	5,436	8%
Symonds Green	3	4,539	-10%
Woodfield	3	4,277	-15%

*Data based on December 2019 electoral registers.

Preliminary stage and Part One of the Electoral Review

- 3.3 In February 2021 the LGBCE commenced their Electoral Review of Stevenage Borough Council.
- 3.4 Prior to the review commencing the LGBCE held briefings with Council officers and Members, providing information on the various stages of the review. The Council was also required to provide a variety of data including, but not limited to, electoral register data, forecast electorate data for the next five years (2027) and polling district electronic maps.
- 3.5 Part one of the Review was to determine the size of the Council (i.e., the total number of Councillors to be elected to the Council in the future).
- 3.6 At this stage the Commission invited the Council and/or its political groups to develop proposals and present the Commission with a case for a Council size that they believed was right for their community.
- 3.7 The Commission would then make a judgement on Council size by considering three broad areas:
- the governance arrangements of the Council and how it takes decisions across the broad range of its responsibilities;
 - the Council’s scrutiny functions relating to its own decision making and the Council’s responsibilities to outside bodies, and;

- the representational role for councillors in the local community and how they engage people, conduct casework and represent the council on local partner organisations.
- 3.8 The Council set up a Cross Party Working Group (based on the proportionality of its Members) to work through the different phases of the review. A Terms of Reference was established and the Group met regularly during the various stages of the review.
- 3.9 The deadline for the submission of Council size proposals was 5 October 2021.
- 3.10 In the first phase of the review on Council size a joint submission was made by the Labour and Conservative Groups, and a separate submission was made by the Liberal Democrat Group.
- 3.11 As Stevenage Borough Council elects Members by thirds, legislation states that the Commission must be mindful of the benefits of a uniform pattern of three-member wards. Therefore, at the Council size stage, they would be looking for proposals for a Council size which is divisible by three. Any potential change to the electoral cycle would be a matter for the Council and not the Commission.
- 3.12 On 23 November 2021 the Commission wrote to the Chief Executive of the Council to confirm that the Commission were minded to recommend that 39 Councillors should be elected to the Council in the future (the same as the current arrangements).

Part Two of the Electoral Review: Warding Arrangements

- 3.13 Part two of the review was to provide the Commission with proposals for new Warding Patterns. This part of the review included two phases of public consultation. The first part of consultation would be used to draw up draft recommendations for new boundaries across the area. The second round of consultation invited comments on the draft recommendations, prior to developing final recommendations.
- 3.14 During this phase of the review the Commission held community briefings to provide information on the review and how submissions could be made.
- 3.15 The Commission sought to draw up new electoral arrangements that provided the best balance of their statutory criteria. The criteria included three main elements:
 - **delivering electoral equality for local voters.** This meant ensuring that each councillor represented roughly the same number of voters so that the value of someone's vote is the same regardless of where they live in the local authority area;
 - **interests and identities of local communities.** This meant establishing electoral arrangements which, as far as possible, avoid splitting local ties and where boundaries are easily identifiable, and;
 - **effective and convenient local government.** This meant ensuring that the wards can be represented effectively by their elected representatives and that the new electoral arrangements, including

both the Council size decision and warding arrangements, allow the local authority to conduct its business effectively.

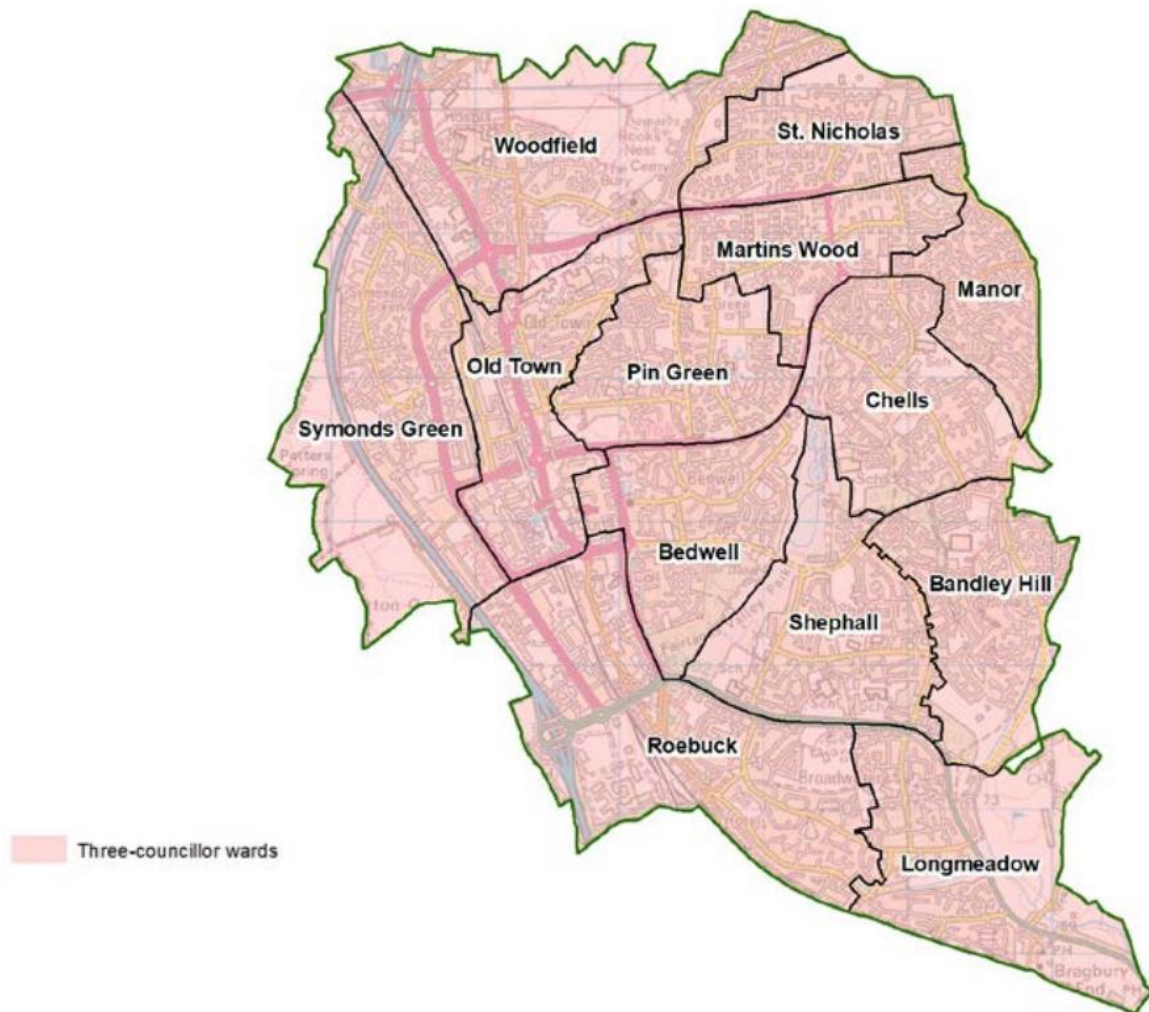
The initial consultation on Warding Patterns commenced on 23 November 2021 and concluded on 28 February 2022 (this was extended from 31 January 2022).

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The final recommendations made by the LGBCE make wholesale changes to the Wards of the Borough of Stevenage. This report provides Members with details in respect of those recommendations, and the consequential matters following this review in respect of the subsequent Polling District and Polling Places Review, and elections to be held in May 2024.
- 4.2 A total of 24 submissions were received by the LGBCE in response to the initial consultation on Ward boundaries. These included Borough wide proposals from the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups.
- 4.3 The Commission published its draft recommendations on 31 May 2022. These are available to view at: https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Reviews/Eastern/Hertfordshire/Stevenage/Report%20for%20Publication-%20Draft%20Recommendations_0.pdf. The extracts below are of the Ward data and maps form the LGBCE draft recommendations:

Draft recommendations for Stevenage Borough Council

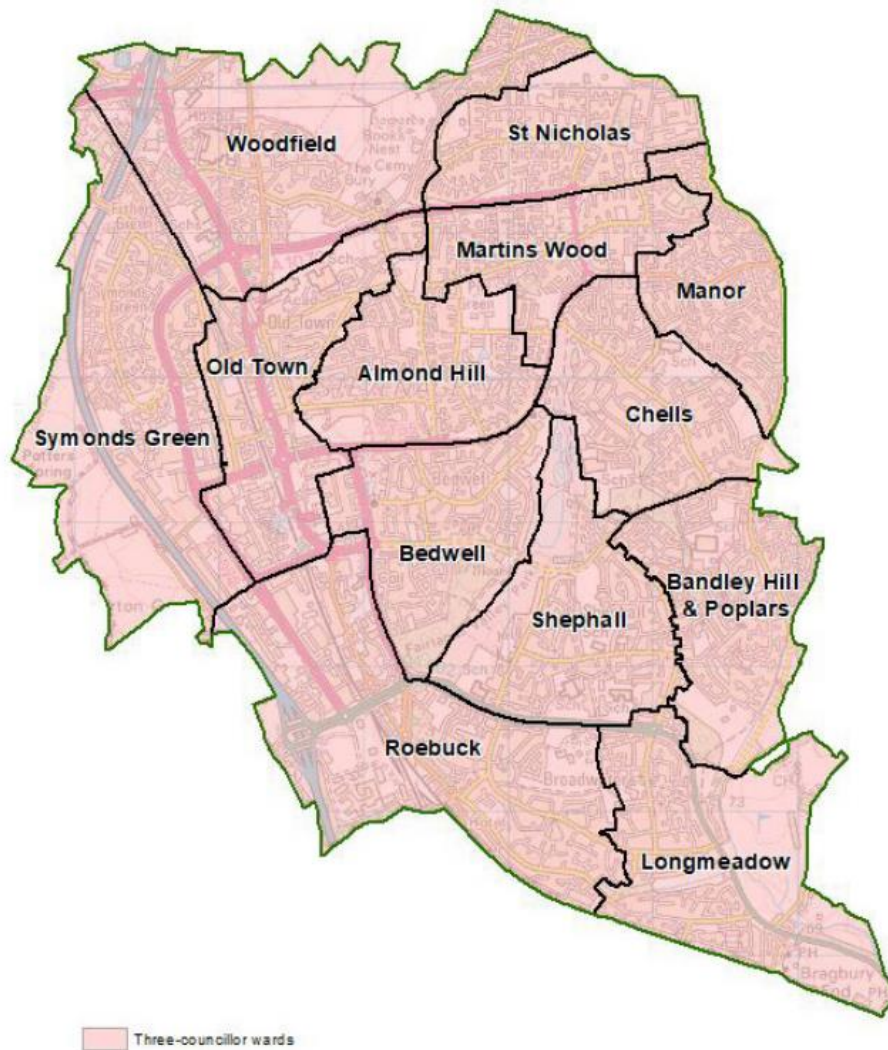
Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2027)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1 Bandle Hill	3	5,562	1,854	11%	5,562	1,854	3%
2 Bedwell	3	5,262	1,754	5%	5,903	1,968	9%
3 Chells	3	5,921	1,974	18%	5,982	1,994	10%
4 Longmeadow	3	4,680	1,560	-7%	4,950	1,650	-9%
5 Manor	3	5,084	1,695	1%	5,084	1,695	-6%
6 Martins Wood	3	5,102	1,701	2%	5,177	1,726	-4%
7 Old Town	3	4,131	1,377	-18%	5,679	1,893	5%
8 Pin Green	3	5,407	1,802	8%	5,577	1,859	3%
9 Roebuck	3	5,109	1,703	2%	5,592	1,864	3%
10 Shephall	3	5,079	1,693	1%	5,179	1,726	-4%
11 St Nicholas	3	5,296	1,765	5%	5,296	1,765	-2%
12 Symonds Green	3	4,615	1,538	-8%	5,525	1,842	2%
13 Woodfield	3	4,069	1,356	-19%	4,961	1,654	-8%
Totals	39	65,317	-	-	70,467	-	-
Averages	-	-	1,675	-	-	1,807	-



- 4.4 Following publication of the draft recommendations, a further consultation period was held between 31 May 2022 and 8 August 2022, to invite comments on those draft proposals.
- 4.5 The Commission received 99 submissions during the consultation on the draft recommendations. As a result of these responses, changes were made to the draft recommendations. These included changes to the Ward names of 'Bandley Hill' to 'Bandley Hill & Poplars', and 'Pin Green' to 'Almond Hill'. In addition, amendments were made to the boundaries of Longmeadow, Shephall, Chells, Manor, St Nicholas, Woodfield, Almond Hill, Old Town, Bandley Hill & Poplars and Symonds Green Wards.
- 4.6 On 1 November 2022, the LGBCE published their final recommendations setting out the new electoral arrangements for Stevenage.
- 4.7 The full report on the final recommendations is available to view at <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Reviews/Eastern/Hertfordshire/Stevenage/Final/Stevenage%20Final%20Recommendations%20Report.pdf>. The extracts below are of the Ward data and maps from the LGBCE Final Recommendations:

Final recommendations for Stevenage Borough Council

	Ward name	Number of councillors	Electorate (2021)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %	Electorate (2027)	Number of electors per councillor	Variance from average %
1	Almond Hill	3	5,382	1,794	7%	5,552	1,851	2%
2	Bandley Hill & Poplars	3	5,559	1,853	11%	5,559	1,853	3%
3	Bedwell	3	5,262	1,754	5%	5,903	1,968	9%
4	Chells	3	5,474	1,825	9%	5,535	1,845	2%
5	Longmeadow	3	4,902	1,634	-2%	5,173	1,724	-5%
6	Manor	3	5,531	1,844	10%	5,531	1,844	2%
7	Martins Wood	3	5,102	1,701	2%	5,177	1,726	-4%
8	Old Town	3	4,188	1,396	-17%	5,735	1,912	6%
9	Roebuck	3	5,109	1,703	2%	5,592	1,864	3%
10	Shephall	3	4,860	1,620	-3%	4,959	1,653	-9%
11	St Nicholas	3	5,354	1,785	7%	5,355	1,785	-1%
12	Symonds Green	3	4,616	1,539	-8%	5,525	1,842	2%
13	Woodfield	3	3,978	1,326	-21%	4,870	1,623	-10%
Totals		39	65,317	-	-	70,467	-	-
Averages		-	-	1,675	-	-	1,807	-



- 4.8 These recommendations only become law once they have received parliamentary approval. The formal document (a draft Order) to start the process is expected to be laid in Parliament in February 2023. The draft Order will provide for the new electoral arrangements to come into effect for the local elections held in May 2024.
- 4.9 These elections in May 2024 will be ‘all out’ elections; meaning each seat on the Council will be up for election. Each Ward will therefore elect three Councillors. Those that receive the most votes in each Ward at the election will serve a full four-year term, those that receive the second most votes will serve a three-year term, and those that receive the third most votes will serve a two-year term.
- 4.10 A Polling District and Polling Places Review will now need to be undertaken in advance of the elections in May 2024 as a result of these changes. This Review will be undertaken during 2023.
- 4.11 It is recommended that the Council notes the outcome of the review subject to the Order being made in Parliament.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 A level of staff resource was required to undertake the necessary work of the review, and software was acquired to assist in the drafting of warding schemes. This was included in the overall budget.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 In order for the changes made by the Commission to come into force, an Order is required to be made and approved by Parliament. This draft Order is expected to be laid in Parliament in February 2023, with the changes implemented at the scheduled elections to be held in May 2024.

Risk Implications

- 5.3 That the Order laid in February 2023 is not approved by Parliament and the changes do not come into force; Stevenage Borough Council continues to operate with high levels of electoral inequality.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 1.1 All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:

BD1 <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/eastern/hertfordshire/stevenage>

BD2 <https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/node/30912>

APPENDICES

None.