

Bridgnorth Town Council
Meeting: Council Date: 4th July 2023

Agenda item: 6 - Boundary Commission

Summary

It has been proposed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) that in future Shropshire Council elections part of SE Bridgnorth will be included in a Bridgnorth Rural division, centred on Alveley and including the rural area between Alveley and Bridgnorth on the East bank of the River Severn.

It is recommended that the Town Council opposes the creation of a Shropshire Council division which includes part of Bridgnorth Town as a small component, and proposes a different pattern of boundaries in which all areas of the town fall within 3 Shropshire Council divisions.

Background

LGBCE is conducting a review of the electoral division boundaries of Shropshire Council. The review commenced in late 2022 and there was an initial public consultation between late November 2022 and the end of January 2023. A further consultation, on draft proposals, is now in progress with a closing date of 10th July 2023.

The review is a process which aims to ensure reasonable equality of influence between electors, i.e. the number of electors per councillor should be broadly similar (within a tolerance of 10% above or below the average). Shropshire Council's current pattern of divisions dates back to the formation of Shropshire Council in 2009, based on an LGBCE review in 2008. Since 2008, parts of the County have seen electorate growth due to development and people moving into Shropshire from elsewhere. Prior to the review, 19 Shropshire Council divisions were outside the 10% tolerance (including 4 where the ratio of electors per councillor differed from the average by over 25%). The review looks at the number of electors per councillor now and in 5 years' time, when the average electorate proposed for Shropshire Council divisions is 3,594.

The review does not in itself look at electoral arrangements for Town and Parish councils. Normally, these are addressed through a Community Governance Review (which is carried out by the relevant Principal Council – Shropshire Council in this case). However, the boundaries of a Town or Parish Council ward should not cross over the boundaries of a Principal Council electoral division. In circumstances where LGBCE's proposed changes to Principal Council electoral divisions would create a situation in which an existing Town or Parish ward boundary would cross the boundary of a proposed new Principal Council division the LGBCE MUST propose consequential changes to the Town or Parish electoral arrangements. These changes involve creating parish wards which are entirely within a principal council electoral division.

LGBCE is aiming to complete its review and publish its final recommendations in October 2023. The recommendations are given effect by the laying of an order before Parliament, which is subject to a negative vote procedure i.e. the order is automatically made after a period of time unless a vote requested. Changes would take effect at the next local elections (currently scheduled for 2025).

Implications for Bridgnorth Town Council

1. Bridgnorth Town Council's wards are likely to be changed.
2. The timetable may affect whether it is possible to review the Town's boundaries through a Community Governance Review prior to the May 2025 elections.
3. The outcome of the LGBCE review may impinge upon what is realistically possible for changes to the Town boundaries through a Community Governance Review.

Draft proposals

Since the existing Shropshire Council divisions which include parts of Bridgnorth are below tolerance in electoral numbers, and the review is aiming to establish mostly single member Shropshire Council divisions (the existing ones in the Bridgnorth area are 2 member divisions) change in the Bridgnorth area is inevitable.

During the first consultation, both Bridgnorth Town Council and Shropshire Council proposed that there should be 3 single member divisions covering Bridgnorth and Tasley, with Astley Abbots parish no longer being part of a division with the eastern part of Bridgnorth. The Bridgnorth Town Council proposal also included the Hobbins Ward of Worfield parish being within one of these Shropshire Council divisions (currently it is within the Worfield division). Bridgnorth Town Council's and Shropshire Council's proposals also differed significantly in where the boundaries should be drawn in Bridgnorth.

Although LGBCE adopted some of the suggestions of both Shropshire Council and Bridgnorth Town Council, it has proposed a radically different arrangement in combination with proposals for the nearby rural areas. LGBCE proposes to alter the boundaries of the Worfield and Alveley and Claverley divisions, moving Claverley into a new Claverley and Worfield Division. The remainder of the existing Alveley and Claverley Division would be incorporated into a Bridgnorth Rural Division, but this would include parts of Bridgnorth Town. Quatford, Danesford, the area S of the A458 on the East bank of the Severn (Hillside Ave etc.) and the Kings Court, Goodwood Avenue and College Court areas would be within Bridgnorth Rural.

Consequent upon the LGBCE proposals, Bridgnorth Town Council is proposed to continue to have 4 wards, but they would be of different sizes. Bridgnorth West (the part of the town within the Bridgnorth West & Tasley division) would elect 3 Bridgnorth Town councillors, Bridgnorth Castle (co-terminus with the Bridgnorth Castle Shropshire Council division) would elect 6 Bridgnorth Town councillors, Bridgnorth East (co-terminus with the Bridgnorth East Shropshire Council division) would elect 5 Bridgnorth Town councillors and Bridgnorth Morfe (the part of the Town within the Bridgnorth Rural Division) 2 Bridgnorth Town councillors.

LGBCE's proposals map for Bridgnorth is attached as Appendix 1. Extracts from their full report on draft proposals for Shropshire relevant to Bridgnorth are included as Appendix 2.

Comments

1. LGBCE's proposals appear strongly focussed on electoral equality and give less emphasis to appropriate boundaries than the previous Bridgnorth Town Council proposal. Their report does not, however, give what they estimate would be the number of electors within each of the proposed divisions.

2. We have forecast the number of electors for the proposed divisions in the Bridgnorth area using the projections originally submitted to LGBCE by Shropshire Council for the individual parishes and parish wards making up the proposed divisions, which is accessible on the LGBCE website. An exception to this is the part of the existing Bridgnorth Town Morfe Ward which is proposed to be included in the Bridgnorth Rural division. This would include polling district LCF (Danesford and Quatford) and part of polling district LCE. The part of polling district LCE which is included is Hillside Avenue, Kidderminster Road S of the A458, College Court, Goodwood Avenue, Kings Court, and Stourbridge Road east of the junction with Lodge Lane. We estimate this area as having 417 electors and the LCF polling district has 384, so there would currently be 801 electors of Bridgnorth Town in the proposed Bridgnorth Rural division. We would not expect this number to change materially in 5 years' time.
3. Based on 2 above, we disagree with LGBCE's statement that the proposed Bridgnorth Rural division would be 10% below average divisional electorate in 5 years' time. We calculate it to be 12.4% below and outside tolerance:

Parishes making up Bridgnorth Rural –

Table 1

	<u>Electors 2022</u>	<u>Electors 2028</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Proposed Bridgnorth Town Morfe Ward	801	801	25.4
Quatt Malvern	190	191	6.1
Alveley	1763	2060	65.4
Romsley	96	96	3
Total	<u>2,850</u>	<u>3,148</u>	
Desired average division size		3594	
Difference		-446	
Difference %		-12.4	

(Our electorate estimates for other proposed divisions in the surrounding area produce some differences from the variance from average quoted by LGBCE, but none of the differences would take the electorate numbers outside the 10% desired range around the average electorate).

4. The proposed creation of the Bridgnorth Rural division appears to be an attempt to solve issues in the existing Worfield and Alveley and Claverley divisions and appears to us to have insufficient regard to the interests of the electors in the southeastern part of the built up area of Bridgnorth and the villages of Danesford and Quatford. 800 voters who currently elect Shropshire councillors with a clear Bridgnorth focus will be asked to choose a councillor to represent them in an election which would inevitably be focussed on Alveley, some 6 miles away from the Kidderminster Road roundabout. Alveley and its neighbouring parish of Romsley would make up over 68% of the electorate of the proposed Bridgnorth Rural Division. This appears to us not to be conducive to encouraging participation of those 800 voters in the southeastern part of Bridgnorth Town in Shropshire Council elections.
5. The proposed Bridgnorth Town Morfe Ward is allocated 2 Bridgnorth Town councillors by LGBCE, 400 voters per Bridgnorth Town councillor. The average electorate for Bridgnorth Town Council on the current boundaries is forecast to be 610 electors per councillor, so the proposed Bridgnorth Town Morfe Ward would have very poor electoral quality at 35% below average.
6. LGBCE's projection that the proposed Bridgnorth Rural division would have 10% less electors than average by 2028 implies a projection of 3235 electors. Alveley, Romsley and Quatt Malvern parishes together are projected to have 2347 electors, suggesting that Bridgnorth Morfe ward is assumed to have 888 electors. This does not appear to us to tie in with the map supplied. In any event adjusting the boundaries of the proposed Bridgnorth Rural division to include another 80 or 90 electors would not address either the fundamental imbalance between the Alveley and Bridgnorth areas or the poor electoral quality of the proposed Bridgnorth Town Morfe ward.
7. We propose that the area of Bridgnorth Town which LGBCE suggested should be included in Bridgnorth Rural division should remain within a Shropshire Council division with other parts of the town on the East side of the Severn. Our revised suggested approach for the Bridgnorth East division is that it includes all of the Town Council area East of the River Severn plus an area West of the Severn bounded by Stoneway Steps, the N side of the upper section of Cartway and the N side of Friars Street, with a boundary which runs between Bramble Ridge and Love Lane to include the Brook Hollow area. We estimate this would have 3,807 electors in 2028 (6% above the target Shropshire Council division electorate). This area would support 6 Bridgnorth Town councillors and we suggest retaining the existing 4 member Morfe ward and having an additional new 2 member ward (working name Bridgnorth Riverside).

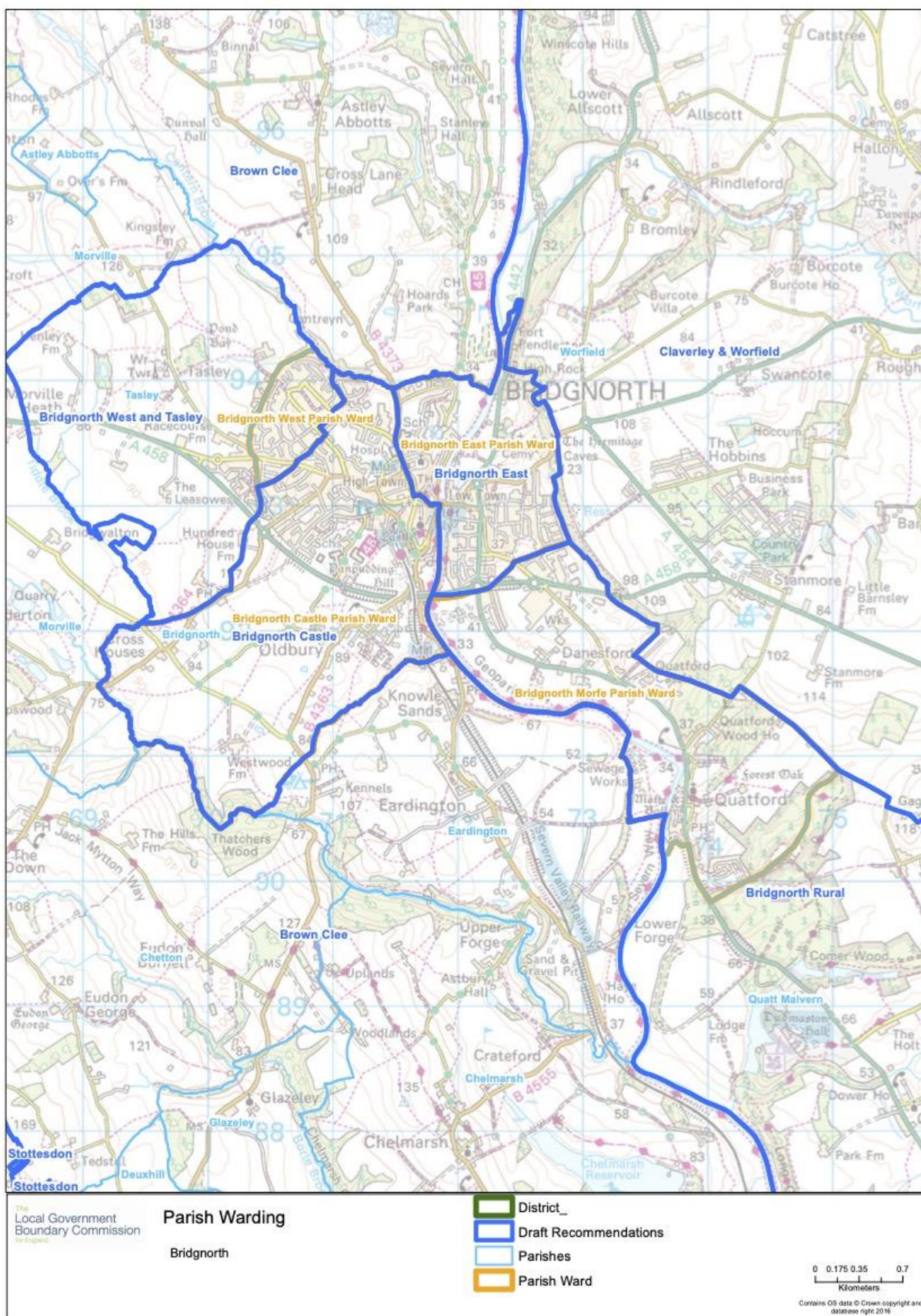
8. Our proposal for the Bridgnorth West and Tasley division is that it includes Tasley parish and the existing Bridgnorth Town West ward, minus Portmans Way, Three Ashes Road, Farmlands Road and Highfields Road (which anomalously are in West ward but on the opposite side of Wenlock Road to most of it). We would also include Cricket Meadow in this division. This division is forecast to have 3,775 electors in 2028 (5% above the target Shropshire Council division electorate). The revised Bridgnorth Town West ward would support the election of 4 Town councillors.
9. Bridgnorth Castle division would comprise the existing Town Council Castle Ward plus the High Street, Love Lane, and Innage Lane areas. Portmans Way, Three Ashes Road, Farmlands Road and Highfields Road would be included in this division. This division is forecast to have 3,748 electors in 2028 (4% above the target Shropshire Council division electorate). This area would support the election of 6 Bridgnorth Town councillors and we would suggest retaining the existing 4 member Bridgnorth Castle ward (including the Portmans Way area) plus a new 2 member ward (working name Bridgnorth St Leonards).
10. The current Alveley and Claverley division is projected to have 3,851 electors by 2028, a 7% variance. This appears to be a viable size and the only apparent reason for proposing to break it up is a perceived mismatch between the Alveley portion and the Claverley portion. We understand that the distance by road between the 2 population centres is about 7.5 miles, not much different to the distance between Alveley and the edge of the built up area of Bridgnorth. There is also a better balance in electoral numbers; the Claverley area would contribute 39% of the electorate.
11. The current Worfield division is projected to have 3,004 electors by 2028, and would be 16% below average size. This deficiency could be remedied by including Astley Abbots parish in the Worfield division, rather than Brown Clee, contributing 390 electors. The resultant division would have 3,394 electors in 2028, a variance of -5.6%. (Brown Clee as proposed is stated by LGBCE to have a variance of +8%, so reducing this by 390 electors would reduce it to -3%.)
12. Our proposals would mean that changes to LBGCE's proposed Shifnal Rural division would be needed as this currently includes the northern part of the present Worfield division. Anomalously, LGBCE's proposal for Shifnal Rural straddles the proposed boundary between the South Shropshire and Wrekin parliamentary constituencies. We do not feel it is appropriate for Bridgnorth Town Council to comment in detail on the proposed configuration of divisions in the Shifnal and Albrighton areas.

Recommendations

- A. That Bridgnorth Town Council proposes the configuration of Bridgnorth area divisions outlined at 9-11 above, and the configuration of Town Council wards suggested.
- B. The Council proposes the retention of the Alveley & Claverley division as currently existing, and the Worfield division as currently existing plus the incorporation of Astley Abbots parish within the Worfield division.
- C. Authority is delegated to the Town Clerk to make a submission to LGBCE incorporating recommendations A and B, in consultation with the Boundaries Working Party.



Detail of LGBCE's proposals for the Bridgnorth area

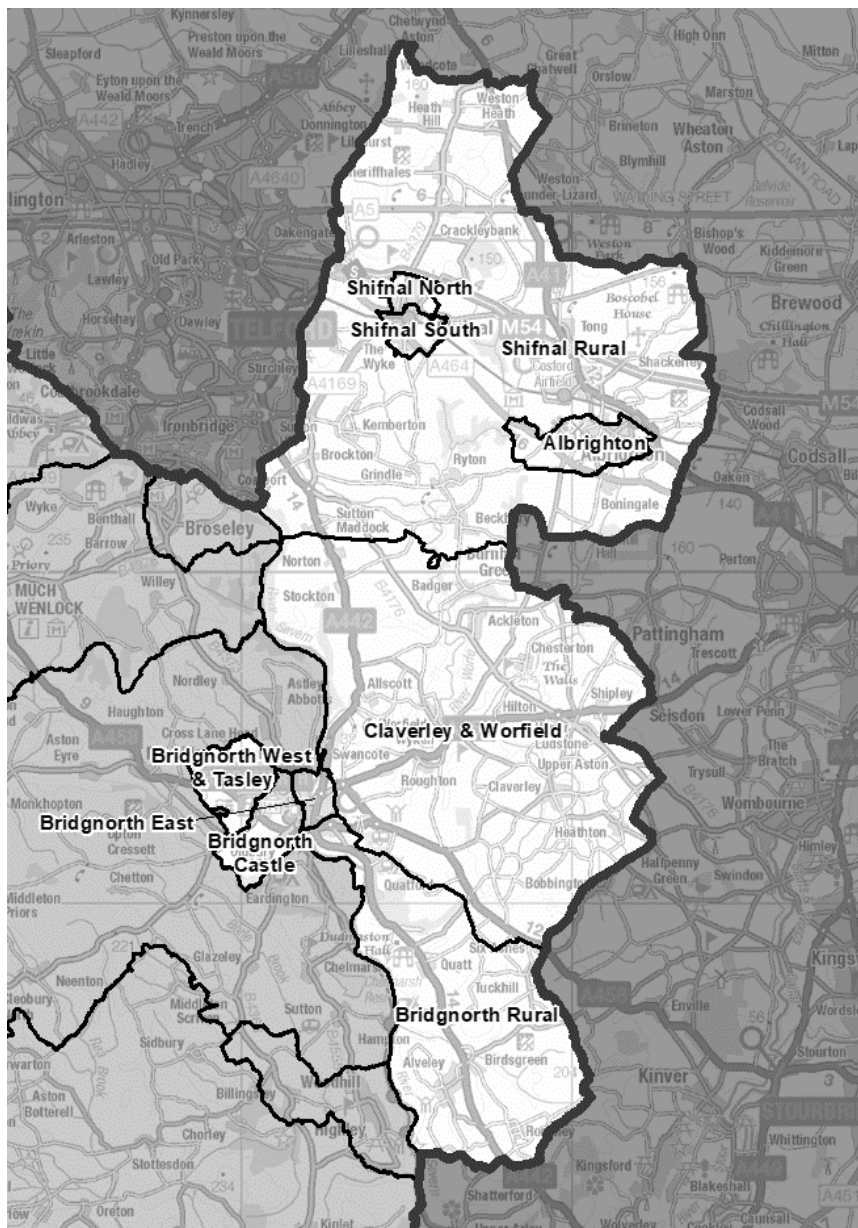


Extracts from LGBCE's report on their draft proposals. The full report can be viewed online and downloaded from

https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-05/shropshire_dr_long_report_-_corrected_-_cover.pdf

(In this document “resident” refers to an individual resident who made a submission relating to the whole of Shropshire, and “the Council” to Shropshire Council).

Eastern Shropshire



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Division name	Number of councillors	Variance 2028
Albrighton	1	11%
Bridgnorth Castle	1	0%
Bridgnorth East	1	-7%
Bridgnorth Rural	1	-10%
Bridgnorth West & Tasley	1	-3%
Claverley & Worfield	1	-4%
Shifnal North	1	2%
Shifnal Rural	1	-4%
Shifnal South	1	-6%

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Bridgnorth Castle, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth Rural, Bridgnorth West & Tasley and Claverley & Worfield

128 Our draft recommendations for Bridgnorth are based on proposals from both the Council and the local resident, who offered very similar ideas. The Town Council also made a proposal for these divisions, and we have incorporated aspects of this. All the schemes proposed very similar Bridgnorth West & Tasley divisions, bringing developments in Tasley parish into a Bridgnorth-based division, and reflecting the northern half of the existing two-member division of this name. The Town Council suggested that the proposed electorate figure for developments in Tasley was optimistic, but we consider the data provided by Shropshire Council to be the best available.

129 We have adjusted the proposed boundary of Bridgnorth Castle division slightly, to improve electoral equality and ensure that electors on Cricket Meadow have access to the remainder of their division. We have also adopted a proposal from the Town Council for Portman's Way, Three Ashes Road, Farmlands Road and Highfields Road to be placed in Bridgnorth Castle division, improving the electoral equality of both divisions and offering a stronger boundary.

130 The resident proposed a division covering both Central Bridgnorth and Astley Abbots parish to the north, while the Council proposed placing this parish in Brown Clee division. While the existing division links these areas, we received evidence from Bridgnorth Town Council that there are few community links between Astley Abbots and Bridgnorth. We are adopting the Council's proposal and placing Astley Abbots parish in the largely rural Brown Clee division as part of our draft recommendations.

131 While the River Severn would undoubtedly offer a strong and clear boundary in Bridgnorth, only the Town Council proposed sticking to this boundary, with the other schemes involving a division crossing the river. There are a total of 8,051 electors forecast for Tasley and the area of Bridgnorth west of the river, meaning it is impossible to propose two divisions with good electoral equality for this area – each councillor would, on average, represent 12% more electors than the county-wide average. We therefore propose to retain the principle of a cross-river division in Bridgnorth.

132 The Council proposed a boundary running along Friar's Street, with only relatively few electors on Riverside and surrounding streets in Bridgnorth East, while the resident proposed a boundary along the B4373. We have adopted this latter proposal, as it not only offers a stronger and clearer boundary, but also facilitates good electoral equality for our proposed Bridgnorth Rural division. Both the resident and Bridgnorth Town Council proposed retaining the existing boundary in the region of Stoneway Steps – we would be interested in further information as to whether this boundary is sufficiently clear, or could be improved.

133 The resident's scheme proposed a boundary along the A458 for the northern boundary of Bridgnorth Rural division, which stretched along the A443 to the edge of the county. This proposal relies on adding the Hobbins parish ward of Worfield parish in order to achieve acceptable equality. The Town Council offered some support for this, but this was based on the industrial estate being a major source of employment in Bridgnorth rather than on considerations of the community identity of the electors. On balance, we prefer to leave Worfield parish in a single division, and instead move the northern boundary of this division northwards from the resident's proposal, to run to the north of Goodwood Avenue and Kings Court.

134 Bridgnorth Town Council suggested that the division boundary south of the town should follow the River Severn, rather than the parish boundary which places an area on the western bank of the river in Bridgnorth parish rather than the neighbouring Eardington parish. We acknowledge the merits of this proposal but, as in other areas, we are unable to adopt this suggestion as the resulting parish ward would have no electors.

135 The Council proposed a division linking Alveley and Claverley, and a Worfield division stretching as far north as Kemberton parish. This proposal also split Claverley parish, with electors in Shipley and Upper Ludstone separated from the remainder of the parish. A resident provided evidence that there were few if any links between Alveley and Claverley, with Alveley's links being mostly towards Bridgnorth. We have therefore not adopted the Council's scheme in this area,

preferring a modified version of the resident's scheme, with Romsley, Alveley and Quatt Malvern parishes linked to Bridgnorth along the A443 in a Bridgnorth Rural division.

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144 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Bridgnorth parish.

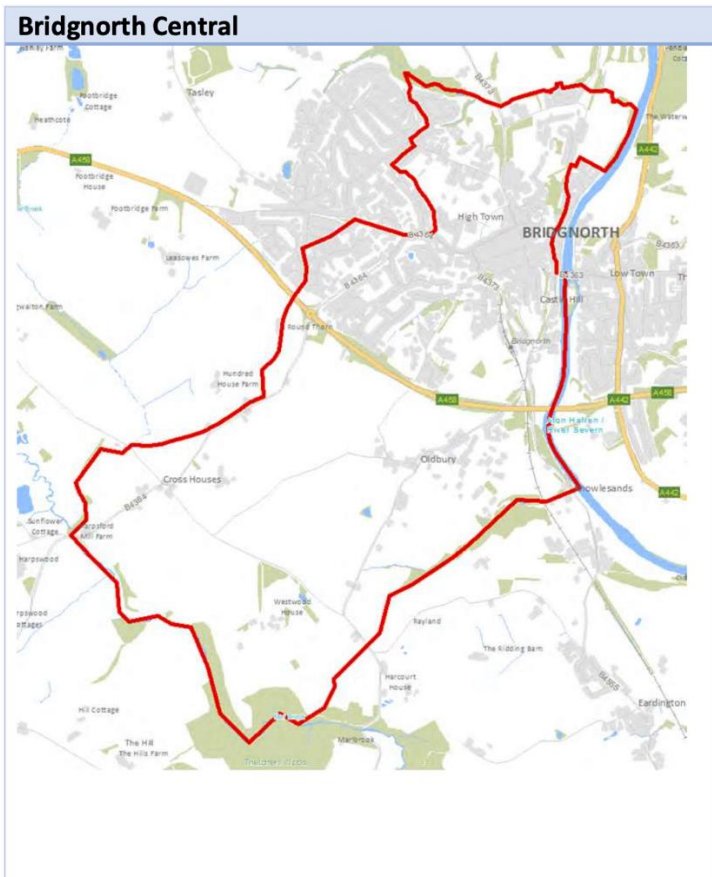
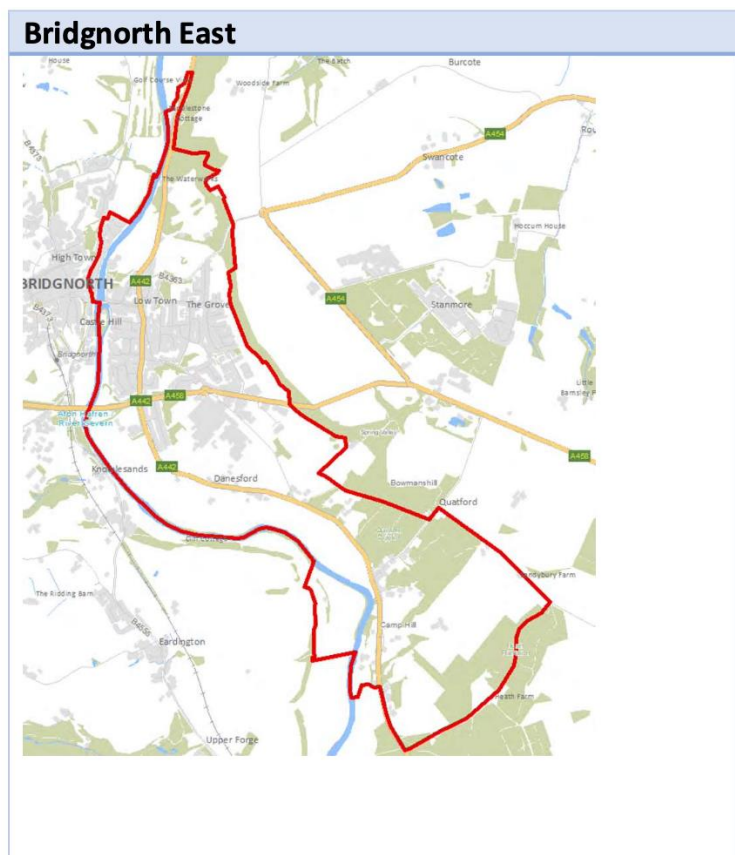
Draft recommendations

Bridgnorth Town Council should comprise 16 councillors, as at present, representing four wards:

Parish ward	Number of parish councillors
Bridgnorth Castle	6
Bridgnorth East	5
Bridgnorth Morfe	2
Bridgnorth West	3

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Shropshire Council's proposals for Bridgnorth in January 2023



Bridgnorth West



Name	Area (KM ²)	Number of Electors (April 2022)	Number of Electors (December 2022)	Estimated Electors Number of Electors 2028	Variance from the average based on 75 Councillors in 2028 (3,547)
Abbey	1.6	3201	3197	3297	-7.0%
Albrighton South	17.8	2717	2691	3271	-7.8%
Alveley and Claverley	69.5	3450	3445	3748	5.7%
Bagley	4.5	3809	3822	3896	9.8%
Battlefield	2.8	3471	3469	3804	7.2%
Bayston Hill	2.7	3727	3724	3994	12.6%
Belle Vue	1.1	3486	3424	3551	0.1%
Bishop's Castle	181.5	3313	3288	3351	-5.5%
Bowbrook (Bicton Heath)	3.1	3438	3437	3782	6.6%
Bridgnorth Central	5.2	3828	3755	3902	10.0%
Bridgnorth East	5.0	3536	3531	3543	-0.1%
Bridgnorth West	4.9	3233	3228	3969	11.9%
Broseley	7.4	4040	4004	4164	17.4%

Note: Shropshire Council's proposal was for 75 councillors, it is now proposed that there are 74 with an average electorate of 3,594. The variances in 2028 become Bridgnorth Central 8.6%, Bridgnorth East -1.4% and Bridgnorth West 10.4%