

Bridgnorth Town Council

Meeting: Council

Date: 17th October 2023

Agenda item: 19

Boundaries and electoral arrangements

Background

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) has been carrying out a review of the boundaries of Shropshire Council divisions and published its final recommendations on 3rd October 2023. At the same time, Shropshire Council has launched a Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places; comments on these are sought by 31st October 2023.

LGBCE Final Recommendations

LGBCE's final recommendations for the Bridgnorth area are the same as their previously published draft, save that it is proposed to change the name of the previously proposed Bridgnorth Rural Shropshire Council division to "Bridgnorth South and Alveley" The relevant section of their report reads:

"Bridgnorth Castle, Bridgnorth East, Bridgnorth South & Alveley, Bridgnorth West & Tasley, and Claverley & Worfield

117 The Council, political groups, and Bridgnorth Town Council supported our draft recommendations for these divisions, as did Cllr J. Buckley. The latter also suggested that, while she supported the boundaries, a change of name to 'Bridgnorth South & Alveley' as opposed to 'Bridgnorth South & Rural' might be appropriate to clearly identify the two largest communities in this division. We have adopted this suggestion and amended our draft recommendations accordingly.

118 Worfield & Rudge Parish Council also supported our draft recommendations and noted that they would not support any alternative proposal which placed any part of Worfield parish in a division based on Bridgnorth. A submission from Save Bridgnorth Greenbelt echoed these points, as did that of Cllr D. Hodson.

119 Cllr D. Cooper offered an alternative pattern of divisions covering Bridgnorth. The key to his proposal was the retaining of the existing division of Alveley & Claverley. While this division would have good electoral equality (7% more electors than average), moving Claverley parish into an alternative division would make the pattern of divisions for the areas further north, all of which attracted significant support, completely unviable. We have therefore not adopted this proposal.

120 We have carefully considered all the submissions in this area. On balance, given the broad support for our draft recommendations, and the significant knock-on implications of any changes, we are not persuaded to alter our draft recommendations, other than the name of Bridgnorth South & Alveley division. We confirm our remaining draft recommendations as final."

The report makes no comment on the rationale or electoral quality implications for the changes to Bridgnorth Town Council wards. It simply records:

“129 We are providing revised parish electoral arrangements for Bridgnorth parish.

Final 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

“

It will be appreciated that these proposals relate to the existing Town Council boundaries and do not prevent future changes to the Town Council’s external boundaries, however it is understood that the above ward arrangements (once enacted) could not readily be altered.

The proposed ward maps are included as Appendix A (but please note that the map shows the previously proposed name for a Bridgnorth Rural Shropshire Council division).

The recommendations will now go to parliament in the form of a draft order, and if enacted will change the boundaries of Shropshire Council divisions and make consequential arrangements to parish wards, including Bridgnorth Town Council wards. The effect of the changes to parish wards is to ensure that all wards of a parish sit entirely within the boundaries of a Shropshire Council division.

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Polling districts and polling places are common across all elections (parish, principal councils, Police and Crime Commissioner, parliamentary and referenda). There is a statutory requirement to review these once every 5 years. Shropshire Council launched a review on 1st October, and the review is open for comments until 31st October. Any changes will be applied in compiling the new electoral register, which is due to be published in January 2024.

Shropshire Council’s review takes account of revised parliamentary constituency boundaries, which are due to be enacted by 1st November 2023 following a review by the Boundary Commission for England. It does not take account of LGBCE’s proposals for revised Shropshire Council divisions and parish wards, it is assumed further changes will be required prior to the next

scheduled Shropshire Council and Town and Parish Council elections in May 2025.

Electoral Commission guidance is quoted in the report presented to the Shropshire Council meeting on 21st September 2023 as:

“every parish should be in its own polling district, and that, where possible, polling places should be in their own polling district. By having a polling place, and polling station, located within a polling district ensures there is a suitable venue for electors to access. However, it may be necessary to identify a polling place outside the polling district if no suitable venue can be identified.”

(it is understood that in a warded parish every ward should comprise a polling district and have its own polling place).

For future General Elections, Bridgnorth will be within the South Shropshire parliamentary constituency but is not otherwise impacted by the changes in constituency boundaries (i.e. the Town will still be entirely within a single parliamentary constituency). Shropshire Council is not proposing to make any changes to the polling districts and polling places in Bridgnorth during this review – these are tabulated at Appendix B. It is not considered that there are any accessibility issues at the current polling places, which are largely dictated by the availability of suitable venues.

Given that a further review is likely to be needed to take account of revised Shropshire Council division and Bridgnorth Town Council ward boundaries (if enacted), it is not considered appropriate for the Town Council to recommend alternative polling districts and polling places during this review.

Recommendations

1. Members are asked to note LGBCE's proposals for revised ward arrangements for Bridgnorth Town Council.
2. Members are asked to confirm that Bridgnorth Town Council will not object to Shropshire Council's current proposals for polling districts and polling places within the town.



BRIDGNORTH EAST AND ASTLEY ABBOTS

Existing Parliamentary Constituency: Ludlow

New Parliamentary Constituency: South Shropshire

Polling District		Polling Place /Polling Station	Electors	No. of Stations in Venue	Accessibility/Identified Issues
LCA	Astley Abbots	Astley Abbots Village Hall	402	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LCB	Bridgnorth (part of East ward)	Bridgnorth Youth Club	617	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LCC	Bridgnorth (part of East ward)	The Annexe, College House	1188	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LCD	Bridgnorth (part of East ward)	Bridgnorth Community Hall	701	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LCE	Bridgnorth (part of Morfe ward)	St. James Hall	2156	2	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LCF	Bridgnorth (part of Morfe ward)	Quatford Village Hall	388	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.

BRIDGNORTH WEST AND TASLEY

Existing Parliamentary Constituency: Ludlow

New Parliamentary Constituency: South Shropshire

Polling District		Polling Place/ Polling Station	Electors	No. of Stations in Venue	Accessibility/Identified Issues
LDA	Bridgnorth (part of Castle ward) (Oldbury)	Oldbury Village Hall	286	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LDB LDC	Bridgnorth (part of Castle ward)	The Castle Hall	1939	2	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LDD	Bridgnorth (West ward)	St. Leonards Hall Church	2374	2	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.
LDE	Tasley	Tasley Village Hall	855	1	No accessibility issues. No changes proposed.