

## **The boundary review commission's initial proposals**

Broadly speaking, I greatly welcome the proposals of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), particularly the retention of historic ward names and patterns within Ware, and the inclusion of the new North and East Ware development (WARE2 in the East Herts District Plan 2018) which is clearly linked to Ware. However, there are some points of detail where I would suggest that the initial proposals could be refined.

The LGBCE initial proposals do keep all wards within the desired  $\pm 10\%$  variance, but in the area around Ware they are not quite as well-balanced as the original Conservative proposal. This is due to the suggested adoption of a two-member Great Amwell and Stansteads (GA/S) ward. However, the result of this is that Ware wards are significantly under-represented (variance up to  $+9\%$ , for Trinity ward) whereas GA/S are over-represented by  $8\%$ . Moreover, this variance will grow rapidly in the next few years as Ware Trinity ward will gain further electors as more of the planned new N&E Ware development is constructed, whereas no significant building is planned for the GA/S ward.

This anomaly could be easily removed by reverting to a one-member Stanstead Abbots (SA) ward, and a three-member Ware Priory and Amwell ward, but retaining ward boundaries much closer to the existing wards than in the original Conservative proposals. This would allow for the LGBCE's objection to splitting Stanstead Abbots parish, as this would no longer be necessary in the revised plan. This new proposal would be closer to the existing district boundaries and would better reflect the ties of Great Amwell for services, shopping and transport with Ware rather than Stanstead Abbots. In effect, the existing Ware Christchurch (partly), Chadwell and Great Amwell wards have been merged because the current single-member Great Amwell district ward would have been too far below quota.

A single-person ward would need to be in the range 2362-2904 electors. SA would be 2962 if it included all of Stanstead Abbots parish plus St Margarets parish, unfortunately just too large. However, the current Stanstead Abbots district ward boundary follows the current county ward boundary and St Margarets parish is subdivided into East and West. Great Amwell and St Margarets West (GAM2, 452 voters) fall within Ware South county ward. Stanstead Abbots parish and St Margarets East fall within Sawbridgeworth County ward and come to 2510 in total ( $-5\%$  variance). This would precisely retain the existing boundaries of Stanstead Abbots district ward, and is significantly closer to quota than the proposed Great Amwell and Stansteads ( $-8\%$  variance). The boundary between the WP&A ward and SA ward would exactly follow the existing county ward boundary between Ware South and Sawbridgeworth. The whole of WP&A lies in Ware South and the whole of SA in Sawbridgeworth, whereas the combined district ward would be split between these county wards.

These changes would add 2356 voters to WP&A and help balance out representation in the broader Ware area. WP&A would then be around  $1\%$  above quota with about 8000 electors, compared to  $8\%$  above quota for the proposed WP ward. Hence, the variance for both WP&A and SA/SM is lower than for the WP and GA/S wards in the current LGBCE draft proposals, giving better electoral balance as well as better reflecting community linkage patterns.

There is also a remaining anomaly between Ware wards, as Ware Trinity is significantly underrepresented with  $9\%$  variance, which would worsen further as more houses are built in the N&E ware development. If the WP&A proposal is acceptable, it can be further improved by moving the Trinity/WP&A boundary to balance the electorates better, relocating part of Trinity into Ware Priory. The obvious area to do this is Plaxton Way, the Widbury Gardens/Musleigh Manor area and

the associated part of Widbury Hill. These roads clearly look to Star Street and the town centre rather than the northern part of Ware, so this change would be much more in line with local connectivity and community patterns. This would transfer about 182 voters (2027 figures). Plaxton Way has 125 electors, Widbury Gardens 50, Musleigh Manor 7. That takes Priory up to about 8200 voters (+4%) and reduces Trinity to about 5550-5600 (+5-6%). Both are better balanced than in the current LGBCE proposals.

The proposed Ware town wards seem broadly reasonable. However, 4 councillor wards are a little unwieldy. For Ware St Mary's it seems unavoidable, but for Priory I believe it would make sense to split the town wards into a 2-councillor Christchurch ward north of the natural boundary of the river (or the railway line in the area round Amwell End if that gives a better electoral balance) and a 2-councillor Chadwell ward south of this, similar to the present arrangements which work well. The second proposal above, for altering the boundary between WP&A and Trinity, would slightly reduce the size of Trinity East town ward and increase than of Priory/Christchurch, but the electorates would still be in reasonable balance.

Finally, there are some localised anomalies along the proposed district boundaries where they follow the county council ward boundaries that are themselves anomalous. For example, the boundary near Moles Farm does not follow the N&E Ware development boundary, and some roads are unnecessarily split along the St Marys/Priory boundary. I trust that there is flexibility that if the other ward boundaries are later realigned, the district ward boundaries would follow suit. In all cases, at most a handful of electors are involved and therefore there would be no effect on electoral balance from these small boundary adjustments.

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