

Cannock Chase District Council

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Submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on behalf of Cannock Chase Green Party

Initial Consultation Stage on Electoral Arrangements for Cannock Chase District Council

Introduction

The starting point of this submission is based on the LGBCE's stated initial view that there should be 36 councillors representing the electorate of Cannock Chase.

Cannock Chase Green Party (CCGP) believes that what follows is supported by the following legal factors which the LGBCE is bound to consider:

- 1) New wards should leave each councillor representing roughly the same number of electors as other councillors elsewhere in the authority.
- 2) New wards should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities, and boundaries should be identifiable, considering transport links, community groups and facilities, natural or physical boundaries, parishes and shared interests.
- 3) New wards should promote effective and convenient local government, considering the number of councillors for, the geographic size of, and the links between parts of the ward.

CCGP disagrees with the proposal submitted by Cannock Chase District Council (CCDC). CCDC's proposal has been described in various papers seen by CCGP as a "consensus" proposal and one where a set of proposals were "agreed". In order to ensure that the LGBCE is not misled, CCGP makes the point that when CCDC's proposals were the subject of a vote of the Full Council, only the Conservative political group voted in favour of them. The Green Party and Liberal Democrat councillors voted against them, whilst the Labour and Chase Community Independent Party councillors abstained. While CCGP accepts that each proposal submitted to the LGBCE carried equal weight, it should be noted that there was no agreement over CCDC's submission, which was in fact only supported on a vote by councillors from one political group.

Number of councillors per ward

CCGP submits that there should be 36 wards, each represented by a single councillor. A move to this pattern would require all-out elections once every 4 years. These should be fixed to be in years which are different to the neighbouring local authorities and to the County Council elections.

CCGP used the projected 2027 district population of 82,339, divided by 36 councillors to produce a target electorate size of 2,287 per ward/councillor.

Cannock Chase is a predominantly rural area, with very large un- / sparsely inhabited areas consisting of Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and forestry land. 60% of the area of the district is Green Belt, 30% is AONB¹ The three main towns are Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley, the latter two each with their own town council. Norton Canes is a 4th distinct area, with its own parish council. The remainder of the settlements consist of villages, often with a linked identity, but some parished and some not. In this proposal, these form a 5th area, called “The Rural Area”. These 5 large communities can be defined using the current wards as follows:

Cannock

Cannock North, Cannock East, Cannock South, Cannock West

Hednesford

Hednesford South, Hednesford North, Hednesford Green Heath

Rugeley

Brereton and Ravenhill, Etching Hill and the Heath, Hagley, Western Springs

Norton Canes

Norton Canes

The Rural Area

Hawkes Green, Heath Hayes East and Wimblebury, Rawnsley

Using these 5 large communities, as a starting point, CCGP proposes that each is divided into a number of single-councillor wards with the prime aim of achieving electoral equality. This would result, by 2027, in Cannock having 10 wards of 2,340 residents (2% above equality), Hednesford having 7 wards of 2,287 (0% deviance from equality), Rugeley having 10 wards of 2,157 (6% below equality), Norton Canes having 3 wards of 2,266 (1 % below equality) and The Rural Area having 6 wards of 2,392 (5% above equality). (See attached spreadsheet at end of document, Electoral Forecast Proforma 2022 – CCGP Proposed Wards in Green)

The evidence in support of this proposal is as follows:

- **Each councillor should represent roughly the same number of electors** - Single councillor wards are the easiest and most demonstrable way of meeting legal factor 1 above. CCGP notes from the LGBCE’s Technical Guidance that factor 1 takes precedence in boundary reviews. Indeed, it is described in para. 4.33 of the Technical Guidance as a “fundamental democratic principle”. CCGP agrees with this statement. Single councillor wards are the most democratic method of ensuring that all residents in a district have equal representation.

¹ https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ccdc_green_belt_study_final_1- main_report-intro_and_context_0.pdf

The Technical Guidance further states that the further away from electoral equality a proposal is, the stronger the evidence should be to support that (see para. 4.34). Any proposal for a greater number of councillors per ward is likely to result in a higher level of disparity between the number of electors in each ward. This is because the size of each multi-councillor ward must necessarily be higher and therefore the potential fluctuations in population over time are greater. This can be evidenced using the population figures provided by CCDC. There is currently a mix of 2- and 3-councillor wards. By 2027, the disparity from electoral equality using this system will range between 41% under-representation (Hednesford Green Heath) and 28% over-representation (Heath Hayes East and Wimblebury). Only 1 ward will manage to achieve an electoral equivalence of 5% or less.

It is fundamentally wrong that, using the current multi-councillor wards, an elector's vote in Heath Hayes East and Wimblebury is worth twice as much as an elector's vote in Hednesford Green Heath. Under CCGP's proposal, electoral equivalence would have priority. Using the proposed pattern, no wards would have a greater disparity than 6%, 26 wards would have a disparity of 5% or less and 7 would have an electoral disparity of 0. This is achieved by drawing more, smaller wards, focussed on very local communities.

- **New wards should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities** – the larger a ward is, the less likely it is to reflect community interests and identities. The move from 41 to 36 councillors will already necessitate an increase in the number of electors that each councillor represents. To then have multi-councillor wards as well will mean that many of the small communities that residents identify with will not be properly reflected in the wards. This can be evidenced by CCDC's own submission to the LGBCE, which proposes merging the separate communities of Cannock Wood, Prospect Village, Hazel Slade, Rawnsley and a large part of Hednesford Town (formerly Hednesford South ward) into one ward, simply to create a large enough population for a 3-councillor ward. There is very little community link in terms of schooling, community groups, local facilities etc. between the four villages and Hednesford Town. Similarly, the proposal suggests putting further swathes of Hednesford town into Heath Hayes East and Wimblebury in order to attempt to bolster the population of an area which, in truth, is not big enough to warrant 3 councillors. The evidence of this comes from the current Heath Hayes East and Wimblebury ward being 28% over-represented by 2027.

Smaller wards would allow ward names to accurately describe their neighbourhood, rather than being contrived names, which are not recognised by the electorate as a place to which they belong. Smaller wards will mean that areas which have their own community identity such as Bridgetown, which has its own 'village feel', school, working mens' club and community centre (currently part of Cannock South) and Chadsmoor, which has its own school, community hub and Family Centre (currently split between Cannock North and Cannock East) will be able to be part of smaller wards which more closely reflect their identity.

- **New wards should promote effective and convenient local government** – given the rural nature of the district outlined above, large, sprawling multi-councillor wards are difficult for councillors to effectively cover. Wards such as Norton Canes, Rawnsley, Etching Hill and the Heath and Hednesford North are geographically very large. Single councillor wards would be

geographically smaller and easier for councillors to manage (see para 4.45 of the Technical Guidance).

Technical Guidance para 4.48 states, *“we take the view that wards or divisions returning more than three councillors results in a dilution of accountability to the electorate”*. CCGP submits that it follows that the more councillors there are per ward, the more “diluted” accountability will be. CCGP’s proposal for one councillor per ward is therefore the most accountable method of drawing ward boundaries and, absent strong evidence supporting a less accountable distribution of councillors, this proposal should be followed.

Smaller, single-councillor wards would encourage community activists to stand for election in their direct geographic area, thereby widening participation in local democracy. At present, CCDC, in common with most local authorities, is dominated by two political parties (of the 41 councillors, 32 belong to either the Conservative or Labour parties). It is far harder for an individual to stand on an issue relevant to residents in their direct local area if that local area is part of a much larger, multi-councillor ward. Allowing individuals who live in an area, to stand and win in their area on issues relevant to the electorate in their area promotes effective local government, ensuring that the electorate’s voice is heard.

Smaller, single-councillor wards are far more likely to result in councillors being more accountable to the electorate. It would ensure that each ward reflects community interests and identities at the most granular level. Smaller, single councillor wards are more likely to result in councillors voting in the interests of the electorate, rather than simply with their party. An analysis of voting patterns at CCDC demonstrates that members of those political parties frequently, if not invariably, vote en bloc. It is submitted that they are able to do this in part as a result of being detached from the electorate by being one of a number of councillors in a ward covering a large area and many thousands of people. If each councillor was individually, rather than collectively, answerable to a smaller number of electors, it is submitted that they would be more likely to vote ‘with the will of the people’.

Smaller, single-councillor wards would be more future-proof, allowing future Boundary Commission reviews to more easily re-draw ward boundaries due to population change, rather than having a system of large and potentially unwieldy wards, which don’t reflect the local areas that electors identify with. This is demonstrated by the current issue caused by the very large development on the former Rugeley Power Station site discussed below.

Naming of Wards

Although named “Cannock 1”, “Cannock 2” etc. on the attached spreadsheet, CCGP proposes that each ward is named after the communities that it contains or local landmarks. This will help to foster a sense of identity within the wards, rather than the current names, such as “Cannock North”, which

are not readily identified by the electorate. With smaller, single-councillor wards, it will be easier to identify names which resonate with the electorate.

Timing of the implementation of the Boundary Review

The site of the former Rugeley Power Station (currently part of Brereton and Ravenhill ward) is in the process of being redeveloped. There will be thousands of houses built on that site, which is shared with Lichfield District Council area. It is submitted that there is no easy way to deal with this development within the timescales of this review. The two options appear to be:

- i) Create new ward(s) covering the power station site, which won't elect councillors until the development is complete. The disadvantage of this is that the total number of councillors would increase from the LGBCE's suggested 36 and there would inevitably be a period of time where electors had moved into houses within the development, but were not able to elect a councillor until the development was complete.
- ii) Split the power station site between other wards. The disadvantage of this is that the new development may well be viewed as a community in its own right, yet would be merged with other wards and those wards would risk being grossly over-represented in 2023 and potentially under-represented by 2027.

To avoid these issues, CCGP submits that the implementation of this review should be delayed until 2028 so that a solution can be put in place at that time, which encompasses the power station site as well as meeting the 3 legal factors outlined at the beginning of this proposal.

Polling Stations

It is proposed that all polling districts should be drawn in such a way that it is never necessary to use a school as a polling station. Too many schools are currently used as polling stations, each one resulting in tens or hundreds of children missing a day of education – together amounting to thousands of children across the district.

The covid-19 pandemic has already resulted in all children missing far too much schooling. Schools report a widening disparity between children, dependent on the level of home schooling that their parents were able to provide. Looking forward, schools ought not to be used.

In the proposed Castle Ring ward, this could be achieved by using Prospect Village Hall, Cannock Wood Village Hall and the Hazelslade Inn (rather than Hazel Slade School).

Proposals for Specific Wards

Current Rawnsley Ward – see attached maps below (“Castle Ring” and “Rawnsley and Wimblebury”)

The current Rawnsley ward consists of 4 separate, but linked villages – Cannock Wood, Hazel Slade, Prospect Village and Rawnsley. CCGP propose that this is split into two single-councillor wards, each with an electorate of 2,392, as follows:

Castle Ring

This ward is named after the Iron Age Hillfort which is accessible via paths from Cannock Wood and Hazel Slade and is a focal point of the area. Alternatively, the ward could be named Cannock Wood, Hazel Slade and Prospect Village.

It would consist of the current areas of Polling Districts RR 2, 3 and 4 along with an additional 444 voters from Polling District RR1. This could be achieved in a number of ways, for example, including the new housing development on Rawnsley fields along with the Eastgate/Westgate estate; alternatively by including the Saints estate (St. George Drive, St Thomas Drive etc) and Chetwynd Park. This is the preferred option outlined on the attached map. All of these areas are on the cusp of Hazel Slade and Rawnsley.

CCGP disagrees with CCDC's proposal to place the fields to the west of Polling District RR4 and the South of Polling District RR1 into the Heath Hayes and Wimblebury ward. There is no evidential basis advanced to support this, but there are clear reasons to keep the status quo.

The evidence in support of this proposal is:

- 1) **New wards should leave each councillor representing roughly the same number of electors** – subject to any minor variation, this ward would have a number of electors equal to other wards in the area.
- 2) **New wards should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities** – Cannock Wood, Prospect Village and Hazel Slade have a clear, linked common identity and community interests. They are all villages right at the edge of Cannock Chase District, on the border with Lichfield District Council's area. Residents of all three villages therefore commonly look to use the larger facilities in that area, such as shopping in Lichfield and Burntwood; Burntwood Leisure Centre; childrens' groups at Chase Terrace and Burntwood Scout Huts and secondary school education at Chase Terrace and Erasmus Darwin Academies. These are not elements of community identity shared with Hednesford Town.

Prospect Village has no community facilities, other than its village hall. Residents therefore use The Rag pub (between Prospect Village and Cannock Wood) or the Hazel Slade Inn; the shop and Post Office in Hazel Slade and children from the village attend Hazel Slade Primary School. This creates a link between the three villages.

The number 62 bus is the only public transport available for the villages. This service links the three villages, travelling through them and on to Burntwood. Recent cuts to this service have been opposed by campaigners from all three villages.

The main road link is the Cannock Wood Street, Cannock Wood Road, Sevens Road artery, which joins Hazel Slade to Prospect Village.

The fields referred to above should remain part of this ward as there is a clear link between them and Prospect Village and Hazel Slade. The fields are accessed from Sevens Road in Prospect Village and from a road which runs between Chetwynd Park and the cricket club off Littleworth Road. It does not make sense to split farmland and the access roads to that farmland between wards. Further, the Old Ironstone Road runs from “new” Ironstone Road in Prospect Village, across those fields, joining up with footpaths on the way, and down to the land of Chasewater Country Park. This is part of the proposed “missing link” of National Cycle Route 5, the reinstatement of which is supported by Sustrans and CCDC. The fields containing that route should therefore remain part of the ward.

- 3) **New wards should promote effective and convenient local government** – as with all proposed ward, this ward would be of a geographic size capable of being effectively covered by one councillor.

The proposed ward contains or is surrounded by a number of long straight roads where speeding is a concern to residents – Sevens Road, Hayfield Hill, Cannock Wood Street and Rawnsley Road. The current two councillors are both members of the Hazel Slade Community Speedwatch Team, which monitors 3 of these roads.

Together, both councillors regularly attend meetings of Cannock Wood Parish Council, Hazel Slade Residents’ Association and Beaudesert Field Trust. It is appropriate to keep these bodies as part of one ward.

Rawnsley and Wimblebury

This ward would be a single councillor ward, comprised of the remainder of Polling District RR1, along with most of Polling District HH4. This would be achieved by continuing the boundary of the current Rawnsley ward south along Wimblebury Road.

CCGP disagrees with CCDC’s proposal to extend this ward along Littleworth Road to include part of the current Hednesford South ward.

The evidence in support of this proposal is:

- 1) **New wards should leave each councillor representing roughly the same number of electors** – subject to any minor variation, this ward would have a number of electors equal to other wards in the area.
- 2) **New wards should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities** –
As outlined above, Rawnsley has a distinct feel and identity as a settlement right on the edge of Cannock Chase District, separate from the main towns of Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley. In that respect it has a similar identity to Wimblebury, with which it is proposed it is joined.

Neither the residents of Rawnsley or Wimblebury would consider themselves to be part of the town of Hednesford. There are clear dividing lines, such as the “Hednesford” signs at the edge of the Rawnsley ward on Littleworth Road. There is also a physical boundary, created by the open space of part of Hednesford Hills SSSI between the edge of the current Rawnsley ward and the current Hednesford South ward as one travels west along Littleworth Road. This provides a convenient physical boundary between wards. The argument advanced in the proposal by CCDC is flawed because residents of Church Hill and Littleworth would not feel an affinity with resident of the current Rawnsley ward. Equally, there is no justification for extending the boundary in this direction just to ensure that Littleworth Road falls completely within one ward. Cannock Chase is a district of many long road and there are a number of examples where a single road properly runs across multiple wards, such as Cannock Road in Hednesford, which currently crosses 3 wards. Finally, it would be wrong to “break up” the parished area governed by Hednesford Town Council by having a district council ward of which only part is in the Hednesford Town Council area. Our proposal leaves the Hednesford Town Council area as a conterminous area containing 7 single-councillor wards.

There is no such physical boundary travelling south along Wimblebury Road and so this should be the preferred option. The housing along Wimblebury Road, on both the Nelson Road estate (currently in RR1) and the Kingscroft estate (currently in HH4) was all built over a similar period of the 1990s. There is a sense of community of common interests between residents of these, predominantly privately owned, modern housing estates, such that they ought to form part of the same ward.

- 3) **New wards should promote effective and convenient local government** – as with all proposed ward, this ward would be of a geographic size capable of being effectively covered by one councillor.

This ward will be conveniently linked by the two main road – Littleworth Road and Wimblebury Road.

Existing Brereton and Ravenhill ward

If the proposal above to delay implementation of this boundary review until the housing development on the old Rugeley Power Station site is complete is not followed. CCGP recommends the following:

This ward is predicted to see the biggest growth in the district as a result of the development on the former power station site. As this development is such a long-term one, any changes to the boundaries ought to be future-proof – containing a number of electors both now and by 2027, which is within the target range.

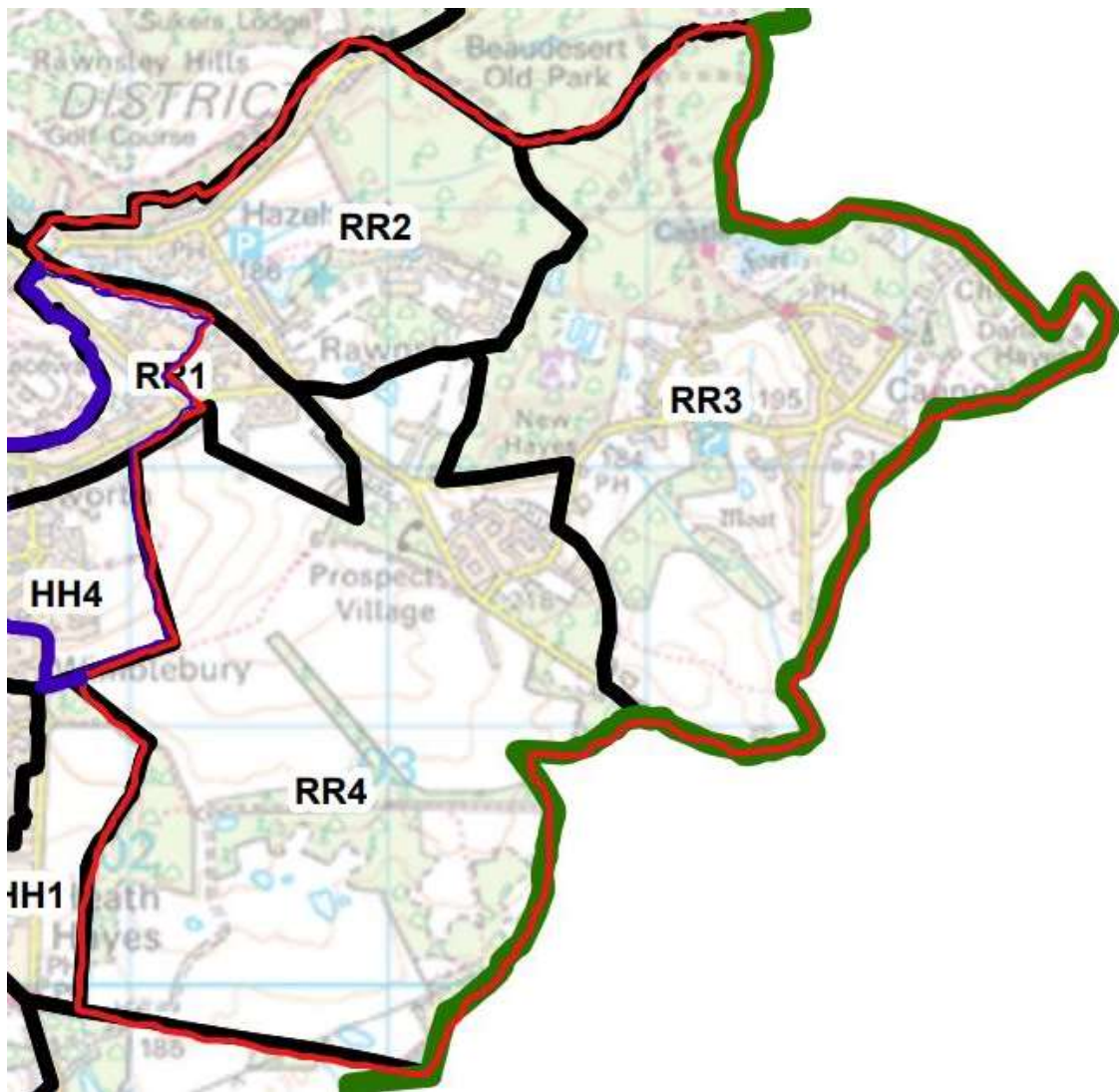
The existing Brereton and Ravenhill ward combined with polling districts WS1 and parts of WS2 collectively have a population now of 8,000 and by 2027 will have a population of 10,000.

The total area should be divided into 5 single councillor wards each containing 1,600 electors now, growing to approximately 2,157 electors by 2027. Although the number of electors upon the changes being made would be lower than the target range, it would grow into the target range without new boundaries having to be drawn in the near future.

Electoral Forecast Proforma 2022 – CCGP Proposed Wards in Green

Name of ward	Number of cllrs per ward	Electorate 2021	Variance 2021	Electorate 2027	Variance 2027
CURRENT WARDS					
Brereton and Ravenhill	3	5,247	-6%	7,330	7%
Cannock East	3	5,325	-5%	5,539	-19%
Cannock North	3	5,288	-5%	5,513	-20%
Cannock South	3	6,029	8%	6,376	-7%
Cannock West	3	5,696	2%	5,976	-13%
Etchinghill and The Heath	3	5,122	-8%	5,309	-23%
Hagley	2	3,288	-12%	3,493	-24%
Hawks Green	3	5,368	-4%	5,597	-18%
Heath Hayes East & Wimblebury	3	4,824	-14%	4,969	-28%
Hednesford Green Heath	2	5,396	45%	6,457	41%
Hednesford North	3	5,329	-5%	5,463	-20%
Hednesford South	2	4,199	13%	4,298	-6%
Norton Canes	3	6,401	15%	6,799	-1%
Rawnsley	2	3,627	-3%	3,786	-17%
Western Springs	3	5,196	-7%	5,434	-21%
PROPOSED WARDS					
Cannock 1	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 2	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 3	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 4	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 5	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 6	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 7	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 8	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 9	1			2,340	2%
Cannock 10	1			2,340	2%
Hednesford 1	1			2,287	0%
Hednesford 2	1			2,287	0%
Hednesford 3	1			2,287	0%
Hednesford 4	1			2,287	0%
Hednesford 5	1			2,287	0%
Hednesford 6	1			2,287	0%
Hednesford 7	1			2,287	0%
Norton Canes 1	1			2,266	-1%
Norton Canes 2	1			2,266	-1%
Norton Canes 3	1			2,266	-1%
Rugeley 1	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 2	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 3	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 4	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 5	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 6	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 7	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 8	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 9	1			2,157	-6%
Rugeley 10	1			2,157	-6%
Castle Ring	1			2,392	5%
Rawnsley and Wimblebury	1			2,392	5%
Heath Hayes, Wimblebury and Hawks Green 1	1			2,392	5%
Heath Hayes, Wimblebury and Hawks Green 2	1			2,392	5%
Heath Hayes, Wimblebury and Hawks Green 3	1			2,392	5%
Heath Hayes, Wimblebury and Hawks Green 4	1			2,392	5%

Castle Ring



Rawnsley and Wimblebury

