

2021 Review of Wolverhampton Wards

Public Consultation 19/01/21 to 29/03/21

Submission by City of Wolverhampton Liberal Democrats

1. Introduction

It has been decided that Wolverhampton will keep 20 wards with 3 councillors each, giving a total of 60 councillors for the Metropolitan Borough. The primary aim of the Review is to even up the electorates in each ward, whilst respecting local community interests and identities, and promoting effective and convenient local government. It was identified that certain wards had a variance of more than 10% from the average, and their boundaries would need to be adjusted to achieve a better electoral balance.

The electoral population of the City has remained fairly static over the last 45 years. It was 191,455 in 1975 reducing by 4% to 183,306 in 2001, almost identical to the current figure of 183,681. The 5-year forecast for 2006 saw a continuing decline to 182,900, whereas the 2026 estimate of 190,477 almost sees a return to the 1975 figure. The current ward average is 9,184 or 3,061 per councillor. The 2026 future estimate gives 9,524 electors per ward, or 3,175 per councillor.

Under these proposals, 7 wards would remain the same: Heath Town; Merry Hill; Spring Vale; Tettenhall Regis; Tettenhall Wightwick; Wednesfield North; Wednesfield South. Following the 2001 Review, it is assumed that the other wards also represent local communities, and minor adjustments to their boundaries could achieve electoral balance. For the purposes of this consultation, pre-2018 polling districts have been used, for which the 2020 electoral figures were available, to indicate revised totals.

The changed wards will be listed individually, starting from the south-east, rather than alphabetically, so that the knock-on effects of any changes can be determined. These proposals provide a 2020 draft variance of -5.5% to +3.9% and a 2026 draft variance of -4.8% to +4.5%. Both these figures come with an overall tolerance below 9.5%, and achieve the primary objective of electoral balance with a margin for future change. IAB polling district was split, using individual electorates for the roads in the split area.

2. Bilston East Ward (10,491)

For a start, this ward should be re-named **Bilston South** to complement Bilston North. The Technical Guidance, paragraph 4.62 says “a ‘West’ should only be used where an ‘East’ has been proposed.” The reverse should also be true. There is no Bilston West.

This ward is on the south-east boundary of the borough. The adjacent Ettingshall ward is already too large, and the Spring Vale ward needs no adjustment. The only way a reduction can be achieved is on the boundary with Bilston North. HBA polling district, (1,345) meets this perfectly. It has better links with Bilston North, and is shielded from its existing ward by Lichfield Street, Oxford Street, and the Black Country Route. It is not severing any local community connections. The ward is then left with 9,146 (-0.4%).

3. Bilston North Ward (8,993+1,345=10,338)

The addition of polling district HBA increases this ward from -2.1% to +12.6% of the 2020 average. It will need to adjust its northern boundary with East Park ward to bring its electorate back down. A suitable boundary would be along the centre of Green Park Avenue and Green Park Drive; and the north of Proud's Lane up to the Moseley Road where it would join the existing East Park boundary. This would include the original IDA polling district (318) plus the northern part of Polling district IAB (810 electors) This would leave Bilston North with 9,210 electors (+0.3%). The area to the north of Green Park Avenue has more in common with the KGB polling district to the east of East Park than it has with the area to the south between Proud's Lane and the Wellington Road.

4. East Park Ward (9,096+1,128=10,224)

The contribution from Bilston North increases this ward from -1.0% to +11.3% of the 2020 average. So it needs to lose an equivalent amount elsewhere. Polling district KLA (237) has no connection at all with the rest of East Park. It is separated by the canal, railway, and numerous 'Works' from its other residential areas. It has more in common with the City Centre, and should therefore join St Peter's ward which is well short.

Polling district KIA (611) sits to the south-west of East Park itself, and is not a major residential area. Losing this would cause the least disruption, as there is no other area that would meet the requirement to the north-east or north-west. The only possible recipient would be Ettingshall ward which is well over the 10% with 10,757 electors. It was already due for some adjustment, so the addition of KIA will add to its excess!

5. Ettingshall Ward (10,757+611=11,368)

The addition of KIA takes the Ettingshall total up to 23.8% above the 2020 average. It can only shed electors from its northern boundary, and it is fortunate that the polling district LAB is one of the largest with 2,718 electors. This 'All Saints' area used to be part of St Peter's ward, and there was much argument recorded about this in the Final Recommendations of the 2001 Review (paragraphs 52, 56, 59, 62 and 95). Despite those conclusions, this area has more in common with the City centre than with the rest of Ettingshall ward south of Dixon Street. It is noted that the Labour Group on the Council, and the Ettingshall Ward Labour Party opposed that decision, and 20 years later it should be reversed. The Ring Road doesn't provide a boundary to the north of the City Centre, and the present arrangement creates a very lopsided St Peter's ward.

Returning LAB to St Peter's ward will help to increase that electorate from by far the lowest in the whole City, and restore its original connection, severed solely on the basis of the Ring Road forming a 'good' southern boundary (but not in the north!). Losing LAB with the addition of KIA would reduce the Ettingshall total to 8,650 (-5.8%) Although this would be acceptable, a further adjustment improves matters when considering Blakenhall ward to the west. Blakenhall has a similar total (8,609), but its neighbours, Graiseley ward (8,487) and Park ward (8,293) were even lower, and these three can be improved by a judicious transfer of polling districts. To start the process, polling district JMA (564) from Blakenhall ward is transferred to Ettingshall, as it sits alongside it to the west of Thompson Avenue. This brings the Ettingshall total to 9,214 (+0.3%).

6. Blakenhall Ward (8,609-564=8,045)

With the loss of JMA, Blakenhall goes from -6.3% to -12.4%. But the addition of NGA (1,499) on the west side of the Penn Road from Graiseley ward brings it up to 9,544 at +3.9%, the highest from this set of proposals. The Lea Road would then become an easily-recognised western boundary of the ward, and make quite a compact area north of Goldthorn Hill. The rest of the ward would remain as it is down to the City boundary.

7. Graiseley Ward (8,487-1,499=6,988)

The loss of NGA would leave Graiseley 23.9% below the 2020 average, but help is at hand. Penn ward has 9,993 electors (+8.8%) so can afford to lose one polling district. QEA (878) on Penn's northern border fits the bill to help bring Graiseley back in range.

It remains for Graiseley to claim PGA (1,268), the southernmost polling district of Park ward. This brings Graiseley back up to 9,134 (-0.54%) very close to the average. PGA includes Bantock Park and the residential area to the north of the Finchfield Road. It is not the Park that gives the ward its name. That is West Park, north-west of the centre.

8. Penn Ward (9,993-878=9115)

Penn ward only needed the loss of QEA (878) to bring it down to 9,115 (-0.75%) This area of Penn Fields fits in with the residential area to the north of the Coalway Road.

9. Park Ward (8,293-1,268=7,025)

The loss of PGA leaves Park ward with -23.5% below the 2020 average for the City. It cannot draw from the two Tettenhall wards, which are both in range, although the boundary between them both was previously in dispute! Instead Park can claim RBA (1,914) one of the northern polling districts from St Peter's ward, giving it a 646 boost from its original total. RBA is the residential area north-west of Craddock Street, and fits in well with the residential area in Park ward south-west of Hordern Road. The loss of RBA from St Peter's is more than compensated by the gain of LAB from Ettingshall. Park ward is then left with 8,939 electors (-2.7%) well within the statutory criteria.

10. Oxley Ward (8,937)

Oxley has a similar electorate to Bushbury North (8,987) and Fallings Park (8,934) so could remain as they are, except for the fact that Bushbury South & Low Hill ward has 10,704 electors (+16.5%) and has to lose some to the surrounding area, which will affect its neighbours. Oxley loses EFA (783), its southern polling district to Bushbury South & Low Hill and gains AEA (1,054) from Bushbury North. This is a compact area between Wobaston Road, Marsh Lane, and the Stafford Road as part of Fordhouses, and fits well into the rest of Oxley, instead of being isolated within Bushbury North. It gives Oxley Ward a net increase of 271 electors, leaving it with 9,208 (+0.25%).

11. Bushbury North Ward (8,987)

Bushbury North loses AEA (1,054) but gains the northern CBA (1,270) from Fallings Park Ward giving it a net increase of 216, leaving it with 9,203 (+0.2%)

12. Fallings Park Ward (8,934-1,270=7,664)

Fallings Park loses CBA (1,270) but gains BEA (1,632) leaving it with 9,296 (+1.2%).

13. Bushbury South & Low Hill (10,704+783-1,632=9,855)

This ward has gained EFA (783) from Oxley and donated BEA (1,632) to Fallings Park, leaving it with 9,855 (+7.3%). Although this is below 10%, a further adjustment can improve matters further. It can give BHA (936) to St Peter's ward and reclaim the small RAA (540) from St Peter's. This leaves it with 9,459 (+3%) much nearer the average.

14. St Peter's Ward (7,966+3,891-2,454=9,403)

St Peter's has always had the lowest electorate but it can now be better balanced north and south of the centre. As has already been mentioned KLA (237) has no connection with East Park, and the 'All Saints' area LAB (2,718) was moved to Ettingshall despite strong opposition 20 years ago. The gain of BHA (936) from Bushbury South & Low Hill was needed to reduce its excessive electorate; and the loss of RAA (540) trapped between the Stafford Road and the railway, joined up with EFA (783) to complete its boundary. RBA (1,914) was needed for Park ward, making a strong north-western boundary along the Staffordshire & Worcestershire canal. The gain of 3 polling districts and the loss of 2 resulted in a new total of 9,403 (+2.4%)

15. Conclusion

These proposals represent a viable solution to the revision of Wolverhampton wards to achieve the required electoral equality. Seven wards stay the same: Heath Town with 9,054 (-1.4%); Merry Hill with 9,280 (+1.0%); Spring Vale with 8,993 (-2.1%); Tettenhall Regis with 9,471 (+3.1%); Tettenhall Wightwick with 9,070 (-1.2%); Wednesfield North with 8,676 (-5.5%); Wednesfield South with 8,890 (-3.2%). It might have been possible to move 200 electors from Regis to Wightwick to give them equal electorates, but this boundary caused enough argument during the last Review!

The 2020 variance goes from -5.5% (Wednesfield North) to +3.9% (Blakenhall) which is only a 9.4% range. The figures for 2026 come out similarly, slightly better balanced either side of the average, from -4.8% to +4.5% a range of only 9.3%. The previous Review didn't come anywhere near this level of equality, so it is hoped that due notice will be taken of the suggestions in this submission to the public consultation.

The 'adjustments' will cause minimum disruption to the existing wards. The two wards with more substantial change are Bushbury South & Low Hill, and St Peter's. But in all cases local communities have been respected, and some may find the changes provide an improvement in the way they are represented. It is believed that this will promote effective and convenient local government. The decision to keep 60 councillors and 20 wards helps in this respect. The City of Wolverhampton Liberal Democrats do not currently have any representation on the City Council, so are not in a position to contribute to the Council response. Hence this submission from them now.

David Murray, [REDACTED] **on behalf of**
the City of Wolverhampton Liberal Democrats [REDACTED]