



Report to Standards & General Purposes Committee

Date:	4 April 2024
Title:	Community Governance Reviews: Parishes
Relevant councillor(s):	All councillors
Author and/or contact officer:	Contact officer Mat Bloxham, Electoral Services Manager and Glenn Watson, Principal Governance Officer.
Ward(s) affected:	Buckingham East, Buckingham West, Cliveden, Hazlemere, The Risboroughs

Recommendations:

1) To consider the proposals received from:

- 1. Buckingham Town Council**
- 2. electors from Lake End Road (affecting Burnham & Dorney Parishes)**
- 3. Hazlemere Parish Council**
- 4. Longwick cum Ilmer Parish Council**
- 5. Newton Longville Parish Council**

2) Decide if any of the proposals to review parish electoral arrangements (above) proceed to a review, and agree the draft Terms of Reference, stakeholder engagement and timetable (appendix 3, 4 & 5), as required.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 As reported to the Standards and General Purposes Committee meeting on 24 August 2023, the Council has received enquiries from parish councils and the public seeking to make changes to parish electoral arrangements. The Committee agreed that the CGR Working Group, that was established for the Wycombe CGR, also recommend the draft Terms of Reference and Consultation Plan (as appropriate) for any other parish CGR requests received.
- 1.2 The Council does not simply have to respond to a formal petition. It can consider requests for the Council to use its own powers to commission a review, where these are reasonably based. The Standards and General Purposes Committee on 18 January 2024 agreed an approach to considering CGR requests received from the community.

- 1.3 To date, five formal requests have been received. These requests are summarised in the table (para 2.10). This report seeks consideration of the requests that have been received, having regard to the statutory guidance and the approach already agreed by the Standards and General Purposes Committee.
- 1.4 The Community Governance Review Working Group considered the five requests on 14 March 2024 and recommend to the Committee that all five proceed to review. The draft Terms of Reference, Stakeholder Engagement documents and timetable were also considered and were recommended to be agreed by the Committee.

2. Content of the report

- 2.1 Principal councils may undertake a CGR of any part of the area at any time. This may be in response to receiving a reasonable request for a review, or because it decides a review is required, for example where there have been population changes. When deciding whether to carry out a review in response to a request the council should determine whether the request is reasonable. A request can refer to changes to population or anomalous boundaries. A request is considered unreasonable if it disrupts community cohesion or does not result in effective and convenient local government arrangements.
- 2.2 Where a council decides to carry out a review it must draw up and publish terms of reference and a timetable and complete the review within 12 months. Where a council decides not to carry out a CGR, or rejects a petition, the grounds for this must be given.
- 2.3 The outcome of a Community Governance Review must, in law:
- (a) reflect the identities and interests of the community in that area, and
 - (b) be effective and convenient.
 - (c) take into account other arrangements for community representation and engagement
- 2.4 Any CGR must secure these objectives. It follows that the recommendations must be current, have regard to the future of the area, and be a necessary improvement on the status quo. Statutory guidance has been produced to help apply the principles.
- 2.5 A five-year population forecast to 2028 has been provided for each of the proposals requesting changes to the overall parish council size (number of councillors). The 2028 electorate forecast has the same methodology that was used for the 2021 Electoral Review but uses the 2023 electorate.

2.6 The guidance on council size is that a parish or town council must have no fewer than five councillors. There are otherwise no rules to the number of councillors that a parish or town council must or can have. Research from Aston Business School recommended the following:

Aston Business School	
Electors	Councillors
less than 500	5 to 8
501 to 2,500	6 to 12
2,501 to 10,000	9 to 16
10,001 to 20,000	13 to 27
more than 20,000	13 to 31

2.7 However, the National Association of Local Councils recommends:

Electors	Councillors	Electors	Councillors
up to 900	7	10,400	17
1,400	8	11,900	18
2,000	9	13,500	19
2,700	10	15,200	20
3,500	11	17,000	21
4,400	12	18,900	22
5,400	13	20,900	23
6,500	14	23,000	24
7,700	15	over 23,000	25
9,000	16		

2.8 The Statutory Guidance says:

“Each area should be considered on its own merits, having regard to its population, geography and the pattern of communities, and therefore the Council is prepared to pay particular attention to existing levels of representation, the broad pattern of existing council sizes.” (paragraph 156, page 44).

The Council should also have regard to the important democratic principle that each person’s vote should be of equal weight so far as possible.

2.9 The Standards and General Purposes Committee on 18 January 2024 agreed the following approach to considering CGR requests from the community:

- a. Proposals purporting to come from a parish council or councils should be based on a formal resolution of at least one of those councils;
- b. Proposals purporting to come from individuals or community groups should demonstrate wider support and that any existing parish councils affected by the proposal have already been consulted;

- c. Where a proposal suggests an increase in councillor numbers, a commentary is supplied on how this is justified with regard to the council's success or otherwise in filling casual vacancies.

2.10 The confirmed CGR requests, to date, are as follows:

Requestor	Summary of request
1) Buckingham Town Council	<p>a) merge Highlands & Watchcroft ward into Buckingham North, thereby increasing the number of councillors for this ward from 7 to 8.</p> <p>b) merge Fisher's Field ward into Buckingham South, thereby increasing the number of councillors for this ward from 8 to 9. The wards retain the current names of Buckingham South and Buckingham North.</p> <p>No proposed change to council size. The proposals are requested to better reflect community identity, electoral equality and promote efficient and effective local government.</p> <p>A map showing the current and proposed wards is attached as Appendix 1a and 1b.</p> <p>From May 2025 all of Buckingham Town Council's wards are in the Buckinghamshire Council ward of Buckingham. Buckingham Town Council will be in the new parliamentary constituency Buckingham & Bletchley.</p>
2) Electors from Lake End Road, Lake End	<p>To change the parish boundary between Burnham and Dorney to align with the M4 to better reflect community identity. The proposal will affect 7 houses.</p> <p>A map showing the current and proposed boundary is attached as Appendix 2.</p> <p>From May 2025 Burnham, Dorney and Taplow Parish Councils will be in the Buckinghamshire Council ward of Burnham. All three parish councils will be in the new parliamentary constituency Beaconsfield.</p> <p>The proposal would increase the tax base for Dorney Parish Council by 7 households and reduce the tax base for Burnham Parish Council by 7 households.</p>

3) Hazlemere Parish Council	To increase the number of councillors from 12 to 16 due to the increased workload and increase in housing and electorate in Hazlemere in the coming years. No changes to the parish boundary are being requested. The parish currently has two wards (North and South) with 6 councillors for each ward.
4) Longwick cum Ilmer Parish Council	To increase the number of councillors from 7 to 9 to reflect the increase in housing and population. No changes to the parish boundary are being requested. <i>This request was considered by the Standards and General Purposes Committee in July 2020. It was agreed that consideration of this request be deferred until the completion of the Electoral Review.</i>
5) Newton Longville Parish Council	To increase the number of councillors from 8 to 10 due to a forecast electorate increase and additional workload. No other changes are requested.

2.11 Below is a summary of the key factors for consideration associated with each proposal.

Buckingham Town Council

2.12 Buckingham Town Council was unwarded until 2001, when it then became two parish wards arising from the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) review. In 2014 it then became four wards arising from another LGBC review. These were consequential changes arising from the Commission's changes to the Aylesbury Vale District Wards.

2.13 The parish wards were created 2014 due to a need to ward those parts of the parish area where a principal boundary ran through the parish. The Aylesbury Vale District Ward boundaries no longer exist, following the creation of Buckinghamshire Council. There is therefore no longer a requirement for the two additional parish wards created in 2014 by the LGBC to remain in place.

2.14 The LGBC's final recommendations for the 2023 Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire Council wards do not propose any change to the current parish warding arrangement for Buckingham Town Council, and none of the proposed new Buckinghamshire Council ward boundaries run through the Buckingham Town Council area.

2.15 Buckingham Town Council's proposal does not involve any net change to the overall total number of town councillors. The proposal does refer to the population forecasts in the 2023 LGBC's Electoral Review and that the Council may seek to increase council size in the future, but not currently. The proposal is for the councillors previously allocated to the Highlands & Watchcroft ward and Fisher's Field ward to be incorporated into the North and South wards respectively.

- 2.16 Buckingham Town Council have submitted the following information to explain their proposal, which in summary, is to better reflect community identity, electoral equality and promote efficient and effective local government:

“There is no evidence that it is desirable that either Fisher’s Field or Highlands & Watchcroft wards should be separately represented. These wards are not, for example, single, centrally located villages. Nor are they overflows from other, larger urban areas despite being on the edge of the parish. There are no shops, schools, or facilities in either smaller ward around which the community are likely to develop.

There are no significant community identities in either smaller ward and no recognised ties or linkages would be broken.

The river would continue to be a clear dividing line between the two remaining wards, as it is between the current larger wards so making them more easily identifiable.

No Parliamentary, Unitary or County Boundaries are crossed by the existing wards and so would not be affected by this proposal. As such there would be no confusion for the electorate.”

Electors from Lake End Road, Lake End

- 2.17 The proposal has been received from a resident living in Lake End Road, Lake End and is requested to better reflecting community identity.
- 2.18 The requestors say that the current parish boundary between Burnham and Dorney parish councils reflects the Roundmoor ditch, which pre-dates the M4, however following the construction of the M4, the motorway is a more prominent boundary. Lake End Road also became a cul de sac directly resulting from the M4’s construction. The requestors submission also states that Dorney is geographically closer to the seven houses in the proposal and is the centre of village activity.
- 2.19 The proposal does not suggest any change to the council size and would not affect the current or future Unitary Wards or Parliamentary constituencies. The requestors note that the polling district for the affected seven houses would change from Burnham Lent Rise to Dorney if the proposal agreed. The proposer confirmed that Dorney Parish Council and Burnham Parish Council both support the proposal. Four of the seven households affected, are in favour of the proposal. The proposer has been unable to confirm the views of three households on the proposal.

Hazlemere Parish Council

- 2.20 The proposal received for Hazlemere is to increase the Council size from 12 to 16 Councillors with no change to parish boundaries. The supporting statement from the parish council was: *“We are quite an ambitious council but we have a limited resource in our councillors to take more projects on, hence the request for additional councillors.”*
- 2.21 No reference was made to how the proposed additional four councillors would be allocated to the existing wards, however since the electorate is evenly split across the two wards, it is envisaged that two additional councillors would be allocated to each ward.
- 2.22 The table below shows the electorate from 2019 to 2023 and the forecast for 2028:

Parish Ward	Polling District	Electorate						
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028 Forecast	2023-28 difference
Hazlemere North	RK	3778	3894	3876	3786	3850	3955	+105
Hazlemere South	RL	3602	3735	3663	3607	3664	3664	0
	TOTAL	7380	7629	7539	7393	7514	7619	+105

- 2.23 Using the 2028 electorate forecast of 7619, the National Association of Local Councils recommendations would provide a suggested council size of between 14 and 15 councillors. Aston Business School recommendations would suggest a council size of between 9 to 16 councillors.
- 2.24 Current warding arrangements:
- North Ward 6 seats
 - South Ward 6 seats
- 2.25 Casual vacancies:
- Currently there are 12 councillors out of a total of 12.
- May 2021 local elections:
- North Ward 5 nominations received (uncontested)
 - South Ward 3 nominations received (uncontested)

Longwick cum Ilmer Parish Council

- 2.26 The parish council have requested that the number of councillors be increased from 7 to 9 with no changes being made to the existing parish boundaries. The supporting information from the parish council is as follows:

“The Parish Council currently has 7 seats and at the time of writing 6 members and we would like to increase this to 9. The number on the 2021 census was 1761 which is up from 1347 in 2011.

Since 2011, the number of new homes built is 240, made up of mainly 3 or 4 bed properties.

The Parish Council estimate that the population of the whole Parish now (July 2023) is around 2,050.

The minimum number of parish councillors that a council can have is five. A quorum for a parish council is three or a third, whichever is the greater number.

National research guidance suggests the following levels of representation for parish councils:

Less than 500 5-8 Councillors

501-2,500 6-12 Councillors

2,501-10,000 9-16 Councillors

As you will see Longwick cum Ilmer Parish Council sits nearer to the top end of the 501-2,500 and therefore feels that 9 councillors is a reasonable request to ensure that workload can be spread fairly between members allowing them more time to fully involve themselves in a wide variety of issues / projects. Alongside, projects the Parish Council has also seen an increase in the number of planning applications within the Parish. Each application takes time to read, digest and consider and an increased number of Councillors will allow for a wider view on applications.”

- 2.27 The table below shows the electorate from 2019 to 2023 and the forecast for 2028:

Parish	Polling District	Electorate						
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028 Forecast	2023-28 difference
Longwick-Cum-Ilmer	KC	1023	1169	1304	1408	1423	1505	+82

- 2.28 Using the 2028 electorate forecast of 1505, the National Association of Local Councils recommendations would provide a suggested council size of between 8 and 9 councillors. Aston Business School recommendations would suggest a council size of between 6 to 12 councillors.
- 2.29 Currently there are 6 councillors out of a total of 7. At the May 2021 local elections there were 6 nominations.

Newton Longville Parish Council

- 2.30 The proposal received is to increase the Council size from 8 to 10 Councillors with no change to parish boundaries. The supporting statement from the parish council is below:

“The parish council has decided it wishes to increase the number of members from eight as at present to ten. There is no wish to introduce wards at this point.

The main reason for this is to recognised that as well as around 40 new dwellings in recent years, there has been a significant increase in workload as a result of growth in activities dealt with by the parish council and that the parish council now managing a large community hall. (The hall was built in 1999 by the parish council but run until December 2022 by a charity.)

In addition a major strategic development including 1,855 dwellings is due to start deliver during 2024 with build out over the following five to ten years. When built out, this will result in a two-thirds increase in the number of residents in the parish. The parish council is due to take on and manage a wide range of community facilities on this development. It is envisaged that by 2027 – 2030 a further Community Governance Review will be sought to make a further increase in members to allow for more representative from residents in the new development.

When it comes to consulting the community, there is no local newspaper circulating in the neighbourhood, but we publish a magazine every two months that goes to all households and businesses. The next three issues will be January/February; March/April; and May/June.”

- 2.31 The table below shows the electorate from 2019 to 2023 and the forecast for 2028:

Parish	Polling District	Electorate						
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028 Forecast	2023-28 difference
Newton Longville	BDS	1545	1547	1518	1531	1562	2392	+830

- 2.32 Using the 2028 electorate forecast of 2392, the National Association of Local Councils recommendations would provide a suggested council size of between 9 and 10 councillors. Aston Business School recommendations would suggest a council size of between 6 to 12 councillors.
- 2.33 Currently there are 8 councillors out of a total of 8. At the May 2021 local elections there were 7 nominations.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 If the Standards and General Purposes Committee agrees to commence a review for all or some of the requests, the draft consultation plan for the review is attached (Appendix 3) for consideration and agreement.

4 Resources

- 4.1 It is anticipated that the main cost relating to conducting all or some of the reviews will be officer time associated with delivering the required processes. Approximately 10 days of officer time would be required to conduct all five proposed reviews.
- 4.2 The proposed consultation approach can be carried out using existing council resources, and is not expected to produce additional direct costs, other than officer time.
- 4.3 The Police and Crime Commissioner election will be held on 2 May 2024. The proposed indicative consultation timescales avoids starting a new consultation during the pre-election period and creating additional workload during that peak time.

5 Timetable

- 5.1 If the Standards and General Purposes Committee agrees to commence a review for all or some of the requests, an indicative timetable for the review is attached (Appendix 4) for consideration and agreement which includes flexibility for one or two rounds of consultation, if required.
- 5.2 The statutory stages thereafter will involve consideration of the consultation responses and the framing of draft recommendations (i.e. draft outcomes) to this Committee. The approved draft recommendations would then be consulted upon and the responses considered. This Committee would then approve any final recommendations before Full Council approves the final Order.
- 5.3 The proposal is that any agreed changes would take effect in May 2025, to coincide with the next scheduled local elections.
- 5.4. Requests for reviews can be made at any time. For efficiency and due of the resource requirements involved, it is recommended that should any more CGR requests be submitted to the Council, that these be grouped for consideration at a later date separately to the reviews referred to in this report. The timescale involved in conducting any further reviews would also necessitate a potential implementation after May 2025.